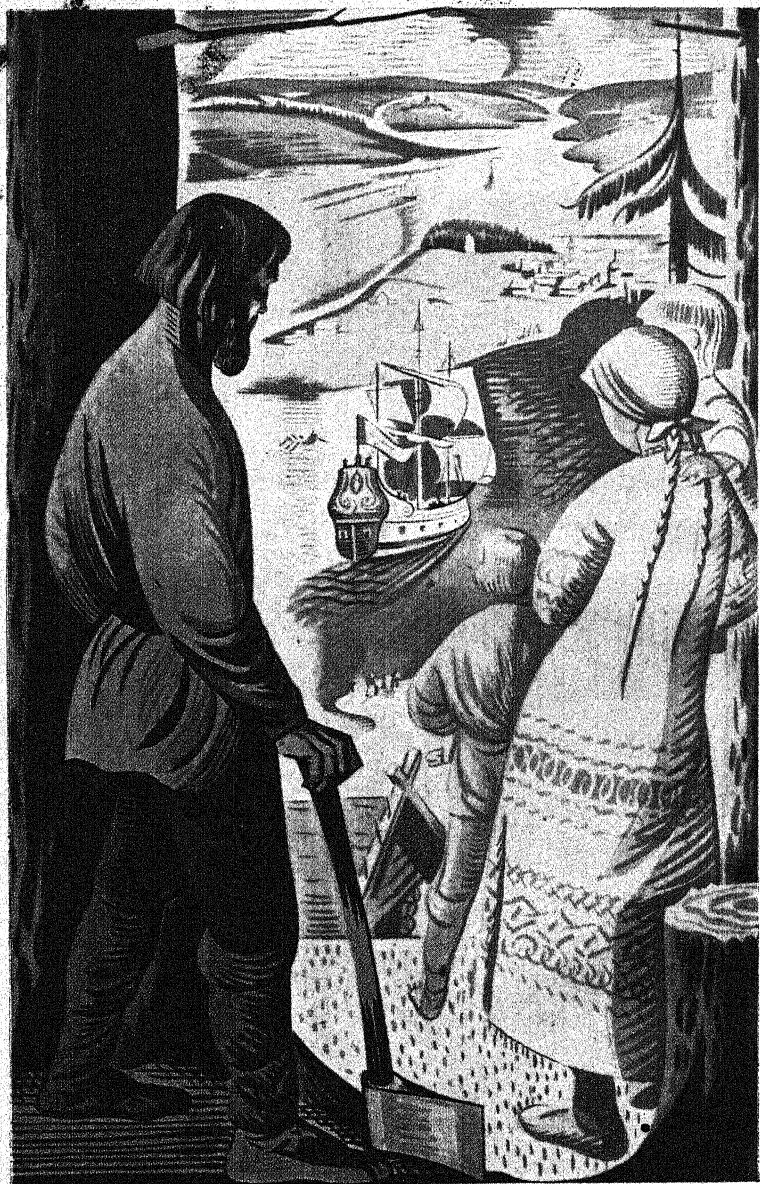


PETER THE GREAT



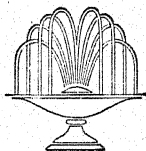
The first ship sails into Petersburg.

PETER THE GREAT

by

NINA BROWN BAKER

Illustrated by MARGARET HORDER



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CHAPTER ONE

MURDER IN THE KREMLIN

PETER THE FIRST, Tsar of all the Russias, sat on a golden stool in his palace quarters, with a Kalmuk slave kneeling before him. The slave held a rare melon, the gift of the Shah of Persia. Discarded rinds littered the jewel-toned Turkish rug. His Majesty did not care a great deal for melons, but they had their uses. With deep concentration and increasing skill he was establishing that it was possible to spit a seed ten feet, twelve feet—even, incredibly, as far as the toy fort of solid gold set up beneath the window. And this with two front teeth missing!

As the final seed pinged against a golden tower, Peter gave a whoop of triumph. "Ivan, did you see that? I hit it! I told you I would! Here, you can take this stuff away now." He gave the kneeling slave a good-natured kick, toppling him backward.

The slave, grinning broadly, picked himself up and began to collect the rinds.

Peter got up and went across the room to his brother. Ivan was reading, as usual. The beautifully illuminated, hand-lettered *Lives of the Saints* lay open on his knee; he was hunched over it, painfully tracing each word with his finger, murmuring them aloud in a slow dull monotone.

Peter laid a hand on his shoulder and shook him impatiently. "Did you hear me, Ivan Alexeyevich? I told you I could spit as far as the window, and I've done it. Right square on the top of the Scottish barbican Uncle Ivan gave me. I've never done that well before."

Ivan's watery, half-blind eyes turned to him. He smiled his gentle, foolish smile. "That is good, little brother. 'And St. Paul came to Eph—Ephesus——'" His gaze went back to the book. The mechanical murmuring broke out again.

With a shrug, Peter left him. The slave had gone now. The two boys were alone in the great silk-draped chamber. The young tsar wandered over to the window, scuffling impatiently in his velvet slippers, his fur-bordered robe trailing the floor.

Since the royal palace lay inside the Kremlin walls, there was little to see from the window. A few maidservants loitered gossiping by the fountain. In the shallow bear-pit a mother bear tumbled her cub playfully in the sand. There seemed to be fewer soldiers about than usual; Peter wondered idly whether the *streltzy*, the national guard, whose twenty-two regiments took turns on duty at the palace, might be meeting in the city again.

There had been trouble with the streltzy lately, as Peter had heard from Uncle Ivan. The men complained that their colonels were withholding their pay, were hiring them out as private bodyguards to wealthy merchants, and were feeding them abominably. Uncle Ivan had talked about it only last night at dinner—he and Artemon Matveyev had seemed quite concerned about it.

Peter was not concerned. The streltzy always saluted him very smartly, and their colonels had knelt humbly to take the oath of allegiance to him. That was two weeks ago, when the *boyars*, or nobles, had proclaimed that Peter was to succeed his dead brother Feodor as tsar.

There were people, Uncle Ivan said, who thought Ivan should have been chosen. He was the elder, being sixteen while Peter was only ten. But the nobles knew perfectly well that poor Ivan would make a wretched tsar. He was lame, half-blind, and more than half an idiot, if the truth must be told. All he was fit for was to read the old books—over and over, and reading never seemed to get any easier for him. What sort of tsar could he be? While as for Peter—

“I shall make a very fine tsar indeed,” he meditated now, idly watching the sunlit courtyard. “It’s true I don’t understand the business very well yet, but I can learn. Uncle Ivan will help me—he knows everything. And there’s Artemon Matveyev. Now that they’ve let him come back from Siberia, I’ll have him to depend on. He certainly knows all about how a tsar should act, because he was my papa’s chief adviser for years and years. I wonder if he

really *is* a black magician? Sophia says he is, but masha says that's just her silly wicked talk."

This was a fascinating subject, and he let his imagination play with it. After all, a minister who could work magic by potions and spells would be a useful person to have around the palace. Provided, of course, that he only worked against one's enemies. The Miloslavskis, for instance. Not poor, gentle Ivan, but the others, the uncles and cousins. Yes, and Sophia. The Kremlin would certainly be a pleasanter place without that long-nosed, domineering old maid who was his elder half-sister.

The Tsar Alexis, Peter's father, had made two marriages. By his first wife, Mary Miloslavski, he had had numerous children. Among them were Feodor, who succeeded him, Sophia, and Ivan. The second wife, Natalia Naryshkin, was Peter's mother. Both wives had large clans of male relatives with political ambitions. When Feodor ruled, the Miloslavskis filled all the important offices at court. Now that the nobles had declared for Peter, the Naryshkins were cheerfully preparing to move in and turn the Miloslavskis out.

So much Peter knew, from dinner-table conversation between his great-uncle Artemon Matveyev and Uncle Ivan. He found the discussions tiresome and paid little attention to them. About all he gathered was that, as a Naryshkin, it was his duty to hate the Miloslavskis. This was easy, because he had his own reasons for hating twenty-five-year-old Sophia, who ridiculed and scolded him ever since he could remember. "It would be a good idea to send *her* to Siberia, where Feodor sent Matveyev," he reflected

now. "I wonder how long one has to be tsar before he has the right to exile people? I'll ask Uncle Ivan to-night."

Young Peter, never much given to inaction, had had enough of idling at the window. He was turning energetically to his toy fort when his eye was caught by a sudden movement in the knot of maids around the fountain. They had stopped their chatter, and were turning startled faces towards the great gate in the Kremlin wall.

Peter looked, too, but could see nothing. The gate was closed. A sentry paced before it as always. But because the girls seemed to be listening as well as looking, he strained his ears. And on them fell, or seemed to fall, a distant murmur of sound. It mingled with the murmur of Ivan's painful reading, so that Peter could not be sure whether or not he really heard it.

He wrenched a casement open and leaned out in the chill May air. Yes, it was clear enough now. The steady beat of marching feet, and over and behind it a roar of voices, a roll of drums.

"Hey, you down there!" the young tsar shouted. "What's going on?"

One of the servants turned a terrified face towards him. "We don't know, young master," she quavered. "We think it's an army—the Swedes, no doubt. They have invaded Moscow. They are coming to murder us all!"

"The Swedes—bah!" More than half a century had passed since the Swedes, under the mighty Gustavus Adolphus, had driven Russia from the Baltic. But Russian mothers still frightened their

babies with threats of the fierce northland warriors.

Even Peter, although he laughed at the woman's fears, felt a thrill of excitement. If the Swedes had come to Moscow, then there would be no need to play at war with gilded lead soldiers. He himself owned a sword, a gem-hilted miniature, it is true, but with a real cutting edge and a needle point. He ran now to kick over the golden fort and find the weapon. "Ivan!" he shouted to his brother, who had not looked up from his book, "Ivan! You'd better get up and prepare to defend yourself. The enemy are upon us!"

Ivan paid no attention. Peter was half-serious, half-laughing as he buckled on the sword. Common sense, of which he had plenty, told him no Swedes could have penetrated as far as Moscow without warning. But the tumult outside was growing louder. Angry shouts were part of the noise now, and distinctly he could make out the word "Death!" Something was happening, and the boy's adventurous spirit rose to meet it.

He was at the door when it opened. Two men, an old one and a young one, entered. They were Artemon Matveyev and Ivan Naryshkin.

Peter had been only four when his father died; Uncle Ivan had taken a father's place in the boy's heart. Ivan Naryshkin, a gay, extravagant, light-hearted young courtier, was fond of his sister's child. It was Uncle Ivan who taught Peter to dance the wild peasant dances, whirling and kicking, shouting "Hotza!" at the top of his lungs. Uncle Ivan had provided the toy soldiers and fort, gravely squatting on the floor to help stage mighty battles.

Ivan had set him upon his first pony, a shaggy wild creature of the steppes, and Ivan had taught him to laugh when the pony threw him, to grin in boyish bravado while the surgeons set a broken collarbone.

He was a person of no great consequence, Ivan Naryshkin; merely a cheerful idler who made the most of the fact that his sister had married the tsar. But it just happened that the boy Peter worshipped him.

Artemon Matveyev was a man of different stamp. He was already foreign minister to Peter's father when the Tsar Alexis met lovely Natalia Naryshkin at his house. Natalia was his ward, the daughter of an old comrade long dead, but she called him uncle. Matveyev and his Scottish wife brought the girl up in a home strikingly different from Russian homes. His house was furnished in Western fashion. His English-speaking wife was a gracious hostess to foreign visitors.

Matveyev himself was learned in science, and manufactured in his own laboratory the medicines used by the court physicians. Since not all patients recover under the doctor's care, deaths did occur in spite of Matveyev's drugs. The Miloslavskis were quick to claim that the deaths occurred *because* of those drugs. It was upon a baseless charge of poisoning Tsar Alexis that Feodor had exiled Matveyev to Siberia.

Matveyev had been restored to his rank and titles on the day that Peter was proclaimed tsar. That was in April, and early in May he reached Moscow after his long exile. He had found a warm welcome in Natalia's palace.

Peter had never seen him before, but his mother had talked so much of Uncle Artemon that it was like meeting an old friend. He found the returned traveller a source of endless delight. Matveyev spoke not at all of his Siberian experiences, but he told the boy incredible tales of his life as a young man, when he had represented Peter's father in Vienna and Paris, in London and The Hague.

The very names had a fairy-tale sound, magic and remote. Russians of the period were not travellers; Peter knew no other man who had ever crossed the Russian borders. That Matveyev had done so, had travelled with careless ease even upon those fantastic things he called ships, that he spoke the queer jabbering speech of foreigners—all this seemed very good evidence that perhaps Sophia was right when she called him a magician. So Peter's admiration was mingled with awe, and Uncle Artemon took his place beside Uncle Ivan in the boy's gallery of heroes.

Girded with his jewelled sword, he marched up to the two men now and threw back his chest. "You can see, Uncles," he boasted, "I am ready. Now let the Swedes come on. They'll not take the Kremlin without reckoning with *me!*"

Uncle Ivan laughed, but Matveyev's face was grave.

"It is not the Swedes we have to fear, Petrushka. Tell me, where is your brother?"

"Ivan? Over there in the corner, reading. Why? Does anyone want *him?*"

"I think a number of people do," Matveyev said grimly. "Listen."

It was true. What the approaching mob was shouting, over and over, came clearly through the open window. "Ivan the Tsarevich! The Naryshkins have murdered the Tsar's son! Revenge—revenge for the murder of Ivan!"

"Why, they're crazy!" Peter exclaimed. "No one has murdered Ivan—here he is! What do they mean?"

Ivan Naryshkin had gone to the window. Now, with the usual smile wiped from his face, he returned. "They are in the courtyard," he said briefly. "The sentry opened the gates to them."

Matveyev asked but one question. "The streltzy?"

"The twenty-two regiments. Fully armed, and carrying their banners before them. They are sweeping around the palace to the Red Staircase."

Before Matveyev could answer, Peter's mother threw open the door. The Tsaritsa Natalia was accustomed to sleep until noon; she had risen hastily, plaiting her magnificent black hair into an insecure coronet, buttoning her brocade gown over a froth of lacy petticoats as she came.

She slammed the door behind her and caught her brother's arm. "Ivan, what is it? The square before the Red Staircase is full of soldiers, and they are shouting the most dreadful things. They are calling for you to come out, Brother. What does it mean?"

"There, there, dear, don't be frightened," he soothed her. "It's only the streltzy, howling for their pay again. Come, we'll soon settle it."

Matveyev intervened. "Not you, Ivan. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I don't think this is the usual streltzy

turbulence. You have nothing to do with their pay. No, there is something more serious behind this. Tell me, Natalia, is your stepdaughter Sophia in the palace?"

"Sophia? Why, no. She went three days ago to the Convent of the Redeemer in the city—she often visits the nuns there."

"I wonder," Matveyev said thoughtfully. "I do not think Sophia has spent those three days in prayer at the convent. And her friend Prince Golitzyn—has he been seen at court? Or her cousin, or her uncles?"

"I have not seen Golitzyn or any of the Miloslavskis for three days," Natalia answered slowly.

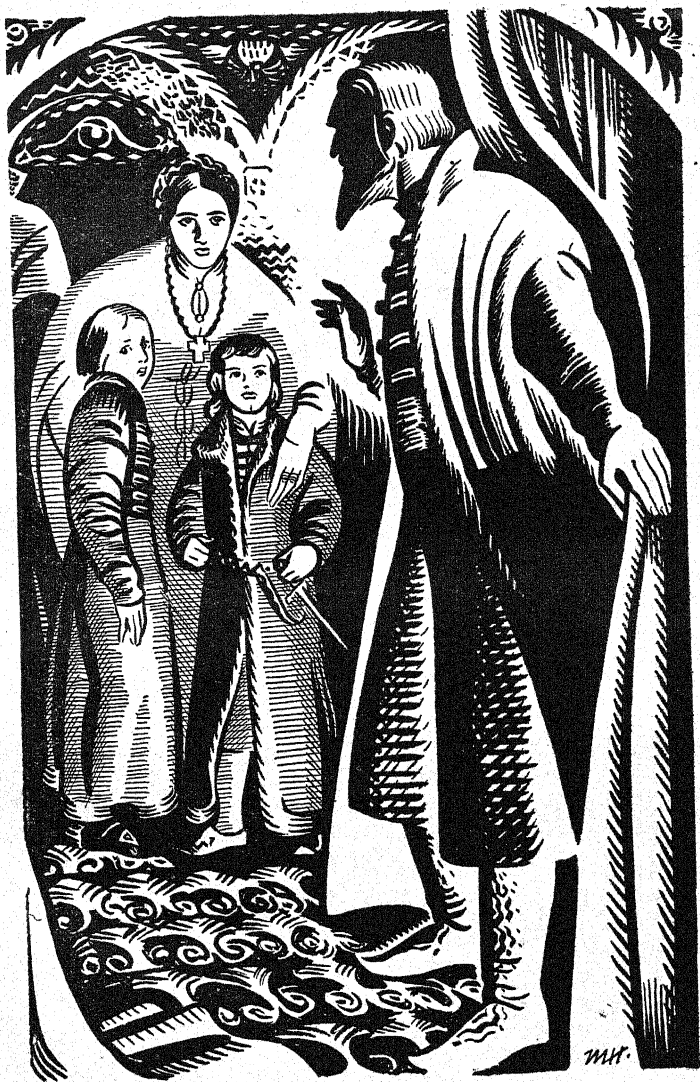
"So? Well, we shall see. Come now, and bring the boys."

Ivan, roused from his book, followed docilely after Peter, who led the way, prancing with excitement.

Down the long corridor they hurried, through the empty state apartments, and into the small chamber known as the Sacred Hall. It was here that the royal family assembled on their way to church. The hall opened upon a balcony from which the famous Red Staircase led down into the square separating the palace from the Cathedral of the Assumption.

The square was jammed with shouting soldiers. They were armed with halberds, tall wooden spears topped with axe blades, so that from above they looked like a forest of shining death.

"They have murdered our tsar's son! Revenge, revenge for the murder of Ivan! Bring out Narysh-



"I will go out on the balcony," Matveyev said.

kin! Death to the assassin!" The hoarse voices seemed to shake the solid palace walls.

"I will go out on the balcony and speak to them," Matveyev said calmly. "The streltzy have always been my friends. Only a week ago, when I returned from exile, they brought me bread and salt in welcome. They will listen to me."

And so it seemed. For as he stepped out on to the balcony and held up his hand, the tumult quieted.

"Men of the streltzy, someone has misled you," he began reasonably. "You shout of murder, but there has been no murder here. Who has told you this silly lie?"

"It is no lie!" a soldier yelled back. "Ivan Naryshkin has murdered the son of Alexis, so that the Naryshkins may rule alone. Everyone in the city knows it."

Matveyev smiled. "You shall see." He turned and beckoned. Natalia Naryshkin came through the doorway, her dark head high, her arms about the two boys.

"Soldiers, look!" she called in a clear carrying voice. "Here is my dear son Peter, your tsar. And here on my other arm, as dear to my heart as my own child, is the Tsarevich Ivan Alexeyevich. See for yourself that he is alive and well."

An amazed murmur went through the crowd, but the soldier who had spoken was not convinced.

"Ivan is murdered!" he repeated. "This is some slave they have dressed in his robes to fool us!"

Natalia gestured towards the staircase. "Come yourselves, then, and see. Ask this boy if he is not the tsarevich."

The soldiers swarmed up the Red Staircase, sacred for three hundred years to the feet of royalty. They pushed and trampled about Natalia and the two boys, and the ringleader seized Ivan by the shoulder.

"Tell us now," he demanded. "Are you in truth the son of Alexis?"

Poor Ivan, his dull wits unable to comprehend this scene of violence, shrank back in terror. "Yes," he chattered. "I am he."

"You see, men," Matveyev interposed swiftly. "The tsaritsa has told you, and you have seen with your own eyes. Now will you go?"

Some of them would have gone, and in peace. But their leader, a common soldier without stripes, now pulled a strip of paper from his pocket. On it was scrawled a list of names. No one knows for certain that that list was in the Princess Sophia's handwriting. Many believe that it was.

The soldier did not read well, and while he wrinkled his brows over the list there came a fatal interruption. Prince Dolgoruky, the palace chamberlain, joined the group on the balcony. He was a fussy old gentleman with a strict sense of palace etiquette, and he was thoroughly outraged.

"How dare you set your vile feet on the royal staircase?" he thundered. "You shall feel the knout for this, all of you! Back, dogs, back to your kennels, or——"

Before he could finish a burly soldier seized him. He was picked up bodily in his long trailing robes and tossed, screaming, over the balcony rail. He landed on the forest of bristling spears and died there.

Blood had been spilled now, and at sight of it the crowd went wild. "More, more!" they screamed. "Clean out the palace! Throw us the parasites and let us deal with them!"

The soldier with the paper had made out a name at last. Matveyev was known to most of the streltzy, whose fathers had served him once. But he was not known to all, and perhaps to the soldier with the list he was only a name. Perhaps that particular man had been entrusted with the list for that reason.

At any rate he now demanded, "Matveyev! Where is Matveyev?" And received the calm answer, "I am here."

Natalia, with the boys huddled against her, had shrunk back against the wall. They gave her Uncle Artemon no time to kiss his beloved ward good-bye, no chance to speak a last word to the terrified boys.

Artemon Matveyev was seventy-two years old. He had served his king loyally and well, taking no part in court intrigues, whole-heartedly devoting himself to the welfare of Russia. He had won respect for his country at foreign courts, he had devised remedies to cure human ills, he had been the patron of science and literature. He had patiently suffered calumny and affliction, and in his long lifetime he had harmed no man.

They tossed him over the balcony rail. And there, before the very eyes of those who loved him, they hacked his body to bits with the cruel axe blades.

For three days the terror reigned in the Kremlin. There were forty-five names on the list, and not all of them were in the palace. The streltzy camped in

the square, waiting for their victims to be dragged in from outside; now and again storming through the palace itself in ruthless search. All of the killings took place beneath the palace windows. And as the victims were discovered one by one, and as forty-five men take quite a bit of time to kill, there was scarcely a moment of the three days when murder was not in progress.

One name, the first on the list, was the last to be crossed off. Ivan Naryshkin had not gone on to the balcony with his sister. Instead, he had prudently removed himself to the family chapel, where the invaders found only a cowled monk prostrate before the altar. He remained hidden there throughout the three days. But on the third day Sophia Miloslavski returned to the palace.

The part that Sophia actually played in the streltzy rising is obscure. It is not definitely proved that she inspired it. The soldiers were already in a state of dissatisfaction. They had rebelled before, although never with such violence. There were other Miloslavskis who might have been more guilty than Sophia. There was also Prince Golitzyn, the young noble with whom the homely princess was said to be madly in love. Other influences lurked in the darkness, aristocrats and churchmen, all with their own fortunes to advance by a change of reigning families.

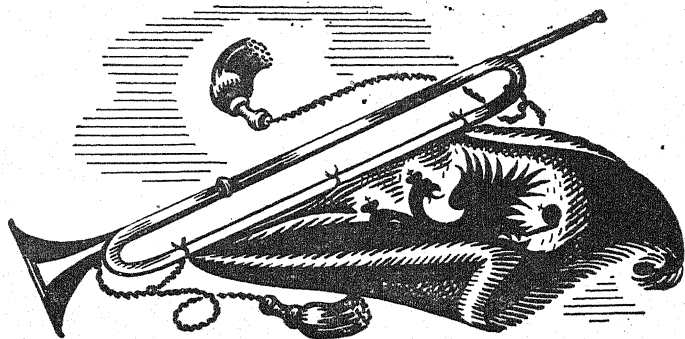
So it cannot be positively stated that Sophia was responsible for the three days' murder. One thing, however, is known with certainty. It was Sophia who, on her return to the palace, told her step-mother Natalia that Ivan Naryshkin must be sur-

rendered to the streltzy. With the last name crossed off the list, with their blood-lust satiated, the soldiers would go. They would not go until then, Sophia said menacingly.

Natalia would have defended her brother with her own life. But Ivan Naryshkin, who had never distinguished himself for bravery, showed himself a man of courage now. He asked for a priest, confessed his sins, and received the last sacrament. Then, while Natalia and the boys knelt with the old priest, brokenly reciting the prayers for the dying, Uncle Ivan walked steadfastly down the Red Staircase to his death.

After his broken body had been trampled into the mud, the streltzy straggled out through the Kremlin gates. The terror was ended.





CHAPTER TWO

THE BOY TSARS

THE chief boyars, or nobles, met and consulted together. They called in the Patriarch and other high clergy of the Orthodox church. Already they had chosen Peter for their tsar, but the disturbance at the palace had convinced them that the Miloslavski family was too strong to be dispossessed.

In the end they decided that there should be two tsars instead of one. Ivan and Peter must reign together, sharing the throne equally. And, by some process which never has been clearly explained, they decided that Sophia, Ivan's elder sister, should act as regent for both boys until they came of age. This suggestion was advanced by some colonels of the streltzy, and perhaps was enforced by threats of further violence. At any rate, it was accepted as a satisfactory solution.

The people of Moscow ratified the arrangement by a curious form of plebiscite. The Patriarch

opened the council-room window and shouted to the passers-by in the street, "Muscovites! Will you have Peter Alexeyevich and Ivan Alexeyevich to rule you jointly?"

Apparently the startled citizens answered "Yes!" The chorus cannot have been very loud, for the hour was 1 A.M., and the dark streets of Moscow unlikely to hold many wayfarers. However, the decision was solemnly proclaimed in all the churches as the will of the people, and no dissenting voices were raised.

The coronation took place a month later, on June 26, 1682. Peter, born May 30, 1672, had just passed his tenth birthday. Ivan was sixteen, and Sophia was well past twenty-five.

The ceremonies began at daybreak, with the great bells of the Kremlin ringing out a joyous tocsin.

The boy tsars, in their robes of state, heard matins in the palace chapel at five in the morning. They then proceeded to the banqueting hall, where all the nobles of Muscovy were gathered to attend them.

The boys wore robes cut from the same piece of cloth of gold, and carried candles of exactly the same height. The robes, ermine-edged and trailing six feet behind them, were thrown over loose-belted blouses of white silk, intricately embroidered in seed pearls and gold thread. Full white silk breeches were thrust into gold-chased boots of soft red leather. Both boys wore swords, but Ivan clutched his picture-book in a nervous hand.

When the nobles were gathered, the procession moved with stately slowness down the Red Stair-

case. The staircase was not red, being actually of a greyish stone. But the word "red" is used in Russia somewhat as we use "golden," to symbolise something very fine. On this coronation day the staircase was decked with green boughs and roses the colour of the blood so lately spilled there.

Natalia watched the procession set off with an aching heart. She herself, with the other ladies of the court, would not descend the stairway until the men were all in church. Then, with veils pulled across their faces, they would steal down and into the church by a side entrance, to take their places behind a gauze curtain. Seventeenth-century Russia was still an Oriental country. Women of quality did not show themselves in public places.

Natalia had looked forward to this day of her son's coronation, but there was no joy in it now. The violence and terror of the streltzy massacre had grievously affected the boy. While it lasted, during the three days that the soldiers camped in the courtyard, he had borne up well enough. Natalia and the children were not molested. She kept the boys with her in her own rooms, trying to distract them with songs and stories. With heavy draperies she shut out the flickering light of the camp-fires, muffled the savage shouts and the screams of the victims.

Because she thought he was old enough to understand, she explained to Peter why Uncle Ivan must go, a sacrifice for peace, perhaps for their own lives. She had been proud of the boy's sturdy bearing, his strong voice when they recited the prayers for her brother about to die.

Poor Ivan the younger, lost in his mazy, mystic

world of fable, had accepted turmoil and the peace that followed with the same placidity. But Peter had broken down completely when the horror was all over.

And well he might, she mused now. Peter had been a very pampered little boy, as was suitable for the son of the tsar. Willing slaves had jumped to gratify his every wish. Cold and hunger and suffering were shut out of the silken, scented rooms which made his world. Peter had known no pain worse than a scratched finger or an overfull stomach. For these minor ills a whole retinue of physicians had hovered attentively, anointing and laving, masking bitter physic with honey and rose-water.

Ten years of that, and then, those three days. Natalia herself shuddered and grew sick at the very thought of them. Small wonder that little Peter woke shrieking at night. Small wonder that his golden bed shook with an uncontrollable trembling, that his face had developed a twitch and his strong little limbs sometimes jerked spasmodically.

Why should it not be so? Peter was not a half-imbecile like Ivan. Peter could think, Peter could *feel*! He had given a boy's hero worship to Artemon Matveyev, and with his own eyes he had seen him torn to pieces, trampled into the mud. He had knelt in prayer while Ivan Naryshkin, beloved foster father, had set his feet upon the stairway leading down to shameful death. No, it was not strange that a small boy's dreams should be nightmares nowadays.

"Weeping, Mother dear?" Natalia lifted her head at the acid voice of her stepdaughter. "How strange!

I expected you to be dancing with joy on this festal day."

"I leave that to you, Sophia," Natalia answered quietly. "There may be joy in your heart. There is none in mine. Shall we go to the church now?"

Sophia had asked a seat for herself on the coronation dais, but the Patriarch had sternly refused it. Regent she might be, but a woman's place was with the other women behind the veil. So, with an ill grace, she was obliged to walk with Natalia down the Red Stair, to settle herself by her stepmother's side in church.

Even seen through the thin curtain, the coronation was a gorgeous spectacle.

A platform, covered with crimson velvet, had been erected under the dome of the cathedral. Upon it were placed two thrones, one for the Patriarch, head of the Orthodox church; the other for the two boys. The silver-gilt throne of Tsar Alexis had been divided by a bar down the middle, and in the back a hole had been cut so that the boys could be prompted in their answers in the long ritual.

The ceremony began with prayer. Then, prompted by a courtier crouching behind the throne, Ivan's weak quavering voice addressed the Patriarch.

"O most holy Father, I pray that thou wilt crown me Great Lord, Tsar, and Grand Duke of all Great and Little and White Russia."

The pontiff bent his head. "To what faith do you belong, my son?"

Ivan needed no prompting here. "To the Holy Orthodox Russian faith."

It was Peter's turn now. Question and answer were repeated. Then the Patriarch rose, and to the deep-voiced chanting of a hidden choir he set a crown upon Ivan's head, and another upon Peter's.

The ancient crown of the grand dukes of Kiev, presented to Vladimir of that line by Emperor Constantine Monomachus of Constantinople, was used for Ivan. It was a flat round cap of sheet-gold, heavily studded with magnificent rubies.

Peter's was a hastily-made duplicate, roughly put together, with rivets showing. The inferior rubies were eked out by bits of red glass. The Danish ambassador, who stood close enough to note these defects, remarked that even though they had crowned him with wheat straw, one would have known that Peter was the real tsar and Ivan the dummy.

Both boys made long speeches, setting forth their intentions as sovereigns. Then came a longer sermon by the Patriarch and the service of the Mass.

The sun was high when the procession left the cathedral for the church of St. Michael the Archangel. The Kremlin walls enclosed twenty-three churches and sanctuaries, and the newly-crowned tsars visited them all. The tour ended at nightfall in the great hall of the palace, where all the nobles of the realm came to bend the knee in homage.

Peter and Ivan called their country Muscovy, from its capital city of Moscow. In the old days the land had been made up of city-states, each ruled by its own grand duke. But now in Peter's time the outlying districts were governed from Moscow by the tsar. These outlying districts were known as "Little Russia," or the Ukraine; "White Russia,"

between the Pripet and the South Dvina rivers; and "Great Russia," the northern section, which also included Muscovy.

Ivan the Fourth, called "the Terrible," had been the first tsar to unite all the Russias under Moscow rule. It was Ivan who, seeing the British sea trade with China flourish under Queen Elizabeth, had annexed Siberia to give his country a land route to the Orient. It was a bitter, bleak land sparsely populated by wandering tribes. The caravan routes planned by Ivan were little used, and Siberia existed chiefly as a penal colony, where political prisoners were sent to work the primitive salt mines.

This was the Russia of which Peter had just been crowned tsar. He was to make some notable additions to it before the senate, in days to come, would bestow upon him the title, "Father of his Country, Peter the Great."

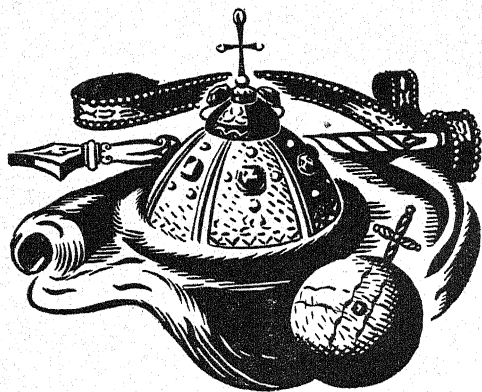
Greatness was far in the future for the little boy who had proudly worn his heavy crown for twelve long hours. His first opportunity to sit down came when he took his place at the head of the long banqueting table in the palace.

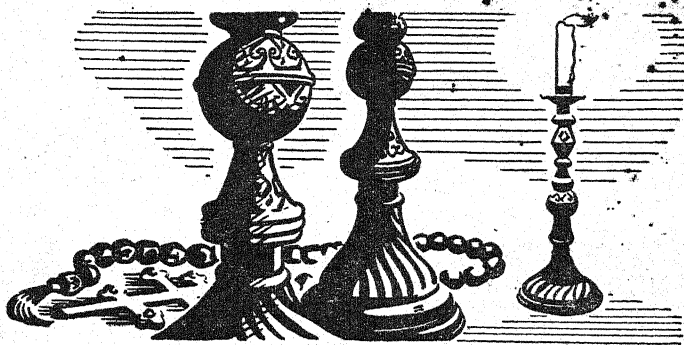
Ivan, overcome by the exhausting day and by the unaccustomed beaker of vodka in which he pledged his wellwishers, went quietly to sleep with his head on the table, and the sacred crown of Monomachus rolled into the soup. The servant who removed it looked inquiringly at Peter, but the younger tsar shook his head.

Peter, for the moment, had put all his terrors and tremors behind him. Vodka is a man's drink, and

it brings manly courage with it. The same Danish ambassador tells us that the boy tsar chatted with statesmen and diplomats as an equal in years, "amazing all by the brilliance of his wit and wisdom."

He wore his crown until bedtime. But he wakened with a fearful headache next morning, which he attributed to its weight. Natalia instructed the servants that hereafter His Majesty should be served Hungarian wine at state banquets, not vodka.





CHAPTER THREE

RULE OF THE PRINCESS REGENT

THERE was no ruby-studded crown for the Tsarevna Sophia, but before many days had passed she made it plain that she meant to govern. Her first act was to appoint her favourite, Prince Basil Golitzyn, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Keeper of the Great Seal. Other offices were distributed among her relatives, the Miloslavskis.

The Naryshkins were banished from court. Natalia, as the mother of Tsar Peter, could not be included in the order, but she voluntarily removed her household to Preobrazhensk, a pleasant country village three miles from Moscow. Ivan asked to accompany her and Peter there. He was frightened of his harsh and bloody sister, and only felt at ease with the gentle Natalia.

Poor Ivan was never to be anything but a figure-head, a pawn in his sister's ambitious game. She wished him to marry, so that with a possible son of

his she could oppose Peter's claim to power. Prince Golitzyn found him a suitable bride, a shy little princess not too intelligent herself. Ivan submissively married her. She was fourteen and he was eighteen. They lived happily enough under Natalia's motherly care. There was no son, but a daughter, Anne, who long years afterward became Empress of Russia.

Sophie and her favourite ruled the country for seven years. They ruled it, on the whole, not badly. It is pleasant to record that they fell out with their friends the streltzy, and had serious difficulties with them.

The question at issue was a change in the Orthodox prayer book, making the service more nearly resemble that of the Roman Catholic church. This was not Sophia's doing, for the change had been ordered by her father, Tsar Alexis. Dissatisfaction had smouldered for years. The "Old Believers," as all who clung to the original form called themselves, refused to worship in churches where the new prayer book was used, and formed themselves into separate congregations.

The men of the streltzy were not the only "Old Believers," but they were the strongest. They demanded that Sophia restore the ancient worship, and when she failed to do so they rose in revolt.

She responded by executing their leader, Khovanski, on a trumped-up charge of treason. When his son led a march of the militia upon the Kremlin, they found it empty, for Sophia had withdrawn to the fortified Trinity Monastery outside

the town. By guile and flattery and the distribution of lavish gifts she eventually won over the troops; and returned to Moscow in safety. But her hold on the streltzy was shaken, and she was never sure of their loyalty from that time on.

Young Peter, running wild on his mother's estate at Preobrazhensk, was happily untroubled by the cares of office. On Sundays and holy days he and Ivan were driven into town to hear Mass in the cathedral; they led the yearly Easter procession. When foreign dignitaries were to be entertained, Sophia grudgingly prepared the Kremlin banquet table for them. For the most part, however, they saw little of the city.

In the good country air Peter grew strong and tall. Natalia was happy to think that the impression of the streltzy massacre was fading from his mind. He seldom cried out in his sleep now, and the nervous twitch of face and limb, although never entirely to leave him, came less frequently.

He was a healthy, happy boy, eagerly affectionate towards his mother and Ivan; much given to hearty practical jokes. Since Natalia, for her time, was no snob, it distressed her only mildly that he preferred the company of soldiers and stableboys to that of the young princelings of the neighbourhood.

Princes, young and old, were a dime a dozen around Moscow. The title was not restricted to royalty, but was freely enjoyed by all members of boyar families. In the royal family, the most-used titles defined relationship to the tsar. Peter and Ivan, before their coronation, were "tsarevich,"

tsar's son. Sophia was "tsarevna," tsar's daughter, and Natalia was "tsaritsa," tsar's wife.

Peter's Naryshkin boy cousins were all princes; they all lived in or near Preobrazhensk, and their fathers sent them every day to play with him. Because who could tell what fine office Cousin Peter might not find for them when they all grew up?

Peter liked soldiers better. And, since Mama insisted that he must spend some time with his little kinsmen, he conceived the happy idea of turning them into soldiers.

He sent to the royal arsenal at Moscow for drums and swords and uniforms, and he got them. He got a drill sergeant, too, a German artilleryman named Sommer.

Herr Sommer, with Teutonic thoroughness, drilled the little aristocrats as though they were real soldiers. He drilled them so conscientiously, long hours in the hot sun, with gruff barked commands and a kick in the shins for the stupid recruit, that their mothers rose up in arms. They sent their darlings no more to play with Cousin Peter, and the regiment melted away.

Only Peter enjoyed the drilling. He took it with Sergeant Sommer's own deadly seriousness, learning to march and countermarch with German precision. He was not dismayed at the desertion of his troops. He simply sent another order to the garrison.

General Patrick Gordon, a Scot who had served Peter's father, was in command there. He mustered his regiments and chose out twenty fifers and thirty drummers, boys of twelve and fourteen, but genuine

soldiers for all that. Later they were swelled by many more.

General Gordon commanded, not the streltzy, which was only a sort of national guard, but the Moscow division of the regular Russian army. Its ranks numbered men of all ages. Boys of twelve, if well-grown and strong, were welcomed. It is true that they were usually placed in the band, but that did not excuse them from ordinary military duties.

As they grew older, and younger boys came in, they moved upward into the fighting ranks. From the beginning they carried arms—usually murderous long knives, since firearms were scarce. They knew how to use them, too.

Peter's "army" was billeted in the stables, with an open field set aside for their parade ground. They had only wooden guns and cannon at first, so their military exercises consisted chiefly of marching and drilling. With music, of course. Music has always been, and is to-day, an important feature of Russian army life. Peter learned to fife and drum with the best of them.

The drumming and the marching behind the stables drew an admiring audience of children whose parents served the tsar's household. Soon new recruits were added from these lowly-born spectators. Among them was the boy Menshikov, who was to become Peter's dearest and most trusted friend.

Alexander Danilovich Menshikov was the son of a hostler in Natalia's stables. The family, wretchedly poor, had lived in Moscow, where at the age of eight Danilovich had sold rabbit pies in the streets. He

was about Peter's own age, a quick-witted, impudent young rascal who feared no man.

It was the custom that a soldier should sleep at night on the floor beside Peter's bed, ready at all times to guard his lord from harm. On Peter's twelfth birthday he asked his mother, as a special gift, to allow Danilovich to take the soldier's place.

"Because *he's* a soldier now," he coaxed, "a corporal in my regiment. He uses a knife well, and he can shoot, too, if he's allowed to have a gun. He sleeps with one eye open and he can see in the dark like a cat. Besides, he doesn't snore, like that great fat lump of a Niko. I'd feel ever so much safer with Danilovich to guard me, Mama!"

Laughing, Natalia gave her consent. Peter still had those dreadful nightmares at times, and he was reaching an age where he was ashamed to call his mother to comfort him. Perhaps the company of this other boy, such a cheeky, merry-hearted little guttersnipe, would be good for him.

It *was* very good for him. The two boys lay awake at night, giggling and chattering when they should have slept, but Peter's frightening dreams came no more.

As Peter grew older, so did his "regiment." General Gordon sent real guns, muskets, and a brass cannon or two. These "play" soldiers were eventually to form the nucleus of the modernised Russian army. The Preobrazhenski Regiment became in time the Imperial Guard, sworn to the personal service of their tsar. All the rulers of Russia, down to and including the ill-fated Nicholas

II, wore, when they assumed military dress, the uniform of the Preobrazhenskis.

Peter never lost interest in his regiment, but as he grew up it absorbed him less, and in time a new passion came to occupy his mind. He saw his first boat, and fell in love with it.

It happened in the spring before his sixteenth birthday. His Dutch doctor had taken him to visit a friend, a Dutch merchant named Timmerman. This gentleman had leased an old estate near Moscow belonging to the tsar's family. In an outbuilding was stored a mass of junk removed many years ago from the Kremlin palace.

Peter, with a boy's lively curiosity, found the rubbish heap fascinating. There were damaged pictures, blackened pots, broken furniture of every description. And buried deeply in the pile was something the like of which Peter had never imagined.

He shouted for his Dutch host. Timmerman looked at the thing and smiled. "That," he said, "is a boat. And what an old-fashioned, clumsy affair it is!"

So it seemed to a Dutchman. But to Peter, who had never seen any craft but a flat river barge, it was a thing of streamlined beauty. Its gracefully curving lines delighted his eye. The mast had broken off to a jagged stump, and there was no sail, but the sturdy oak looked sound.

"Where did it come from?" Peter demanded.

Timmerman did not know, but he called an aged serf who had lived all his life on the estate. The old man only knew what his father had told him.

The "sledge," as he called it, had been sent as a gift from Queen Elizabeth of England to the Tsar Ivan the Terrible. That had been over a hundred and forty years before.

No, so far as he knew, no one had ever found any use for the "sledge." Having only one runner, and that in the middle, it would certainly topple its passengers into the snow. And as they could see, there were no shafts for the horses. In the opinion of the old peasant it was a silly foreign contraption, fit only for firewood.

With a chuckle Timmerman dismissed him. Then, in answer to Peter's eager questions, he explained just what a boat was, why it was shaped in that fashion, how it was propelled by wind.

"Will it go?" Peter asked.

Timmerman looked doubtful. "Well, perhaps. It wants mast and sail, of course. I know a man here in Moscow, a Dutchman named Carsten Brant, who worked in the shipyards at home. I could ask him to have a look at it."

"Get him here at once!"

The royal order was sharp, and Timmerman hastened to obey. Brant, summoned from his carpenter shop, went over the little vessel, finding signs of dry rot. He believed, though, that he could patch it up.

Peter went home in a high state of excitement. He could talk of nothing but boats at the supper table. Natalia listened to him with a sense of uneasiness. She approved of the regiment, for military matters are a proper interest for a sovereign. But in spite of her early contact with Matveyev and

his Scottish wife, she had a superstitious dread of water and water travel. Peter was too excited to notice that she did not share his enthusiasm.

He was back at Timmerman's house by day-break. Carsten Brant was there, too, with his tools and a pile of stout new timbers. The young tsar threw aside his robe and rolled up his shirt sleeves.

"What do we first?" he demanded.

"Your Majesty!" The carpenter looked at him aghast. "This is rough work. You wouldn't soil your hands with it? If Your Majesty condescends to watch, I'll have the servants bring a comfortable chair, and——"

"Nonsense!" Peter said briskly. "Do you think I'm going to let you have all the fun? Of course I'll help."

"But, Sire, that is unthinkable! Even if you could stoop so low, this work needs a skilled hand. I cannot believe that Your Majesty is familiar with tools."

"That's true. I've never had any sort of decent education," Peter admitted ruefully. "Still, there must be something I can do. Who is this man here?"

"That's Kort, my apprentice, Sire."

"And what are Kort's duties?"

"Well, he's learning carpentry with me. He keeps my tools in order, handles the heavy beams, saws boards to the length I've marked—all the odd jobs that don't take much skill. He's just an apprentice, Your Majesty."

"Fine! What Kort can do I can do. So now you

have two apprentices, Master Brant, and let's get on with the job."

"But, Your Majesty——!"

"And a little less of that majesty business, if you please. I'm not on the throne now. Here I'm just Peter, your junior apprentice. If I'm clumsy, you have the royal permission to box my ears. And I'll bet you swing a heavy hand, eh, Kort?"

He fetched his fellow apprentice a hearty thwack on the shoulder, laughing uproariously. After a startled moment the two carpenters laughed, too, and the job began in a spirit of cheerful good-fellowship.

Brant was a slow and careful workman. It took him a week to put the little boat in shape. Peter had never known a week of such perfect happiness.

They dragged the boat out under the trees. Here in the clear spring weather, with the scent of blossoming orchards mingling with the fragrance of fresh-sawed wood, with a stretch and play of muscles to sweeten rest and sharpen appetite, Peter found himself at ease as he had never been in the stuffy ceremonious life at home.

Timmerman sent their meals out to them, and no dish served up at the royal table on gold plate had ever tasted so good. The two Dutchmen quickly lost their awe of royalty and proved themselves splendid companions. Kort particularly was a teller of tall tales, not too refined, whose broad humour made Peter rock with laughter.

Best of all, however, was the talk of ships. The Russia of Peter's days was completely landlocked except for the Arctic port of Archangel, icebound

for a good part of the year. Since Peter had never been to Archangel, the sea and the ships that sail thereon were merely legends to him, belonging more to the world of books than to everyday life. Yet the very thought of sail had always held a fascination for him. Artemon Matveyev had roused it first, with his traveller's tales. The military activities at Preobrazhensk had overlaid this earlier interest, but they had not stifled it. Now it sprang into new life.

Among the incessant questions with which Peter plied Brant as they cut and sawed and hammered was one difficult to answer.

"Suppose," the boy asked, as he held a plank firm for nailing, "just suppose we wanted to build another boat instead of repairing this one. Suppose we wanted to build it like this, only bigger, much bigger. How would we know what length of timbers to use?"

"Well, that's a job for the master builder, that is. He'd have to figure it out."

"Figure? Do you mean arithmetic?"

Peter had had some slight experience with arithmetic, and he had not enjoyed it. From time to time Natalia engaged tutors for him, but no very serious attempt had ever been made to educate him. Learning was the province of monks, not rulers.

"Yes, Master Peter. There's a lot of arithmetic goes into boat building."

"Um. Well, suppose we wanted to build a boat *not* like this. Or suppose we didn't have this one for a pattern, but had to start new. Would arithmetic come into it then?"

"Ay, Master Peter, and worse. You'd be needing geometry then. And algebra, too."

"Never heard of them," Peter said flatly. "Are they something you can learn, like arithmetic?"

"So they tell me," the old carpenter answered cautiously. "I only know about them by hearsay. The master builders use them in the yards at Zaandam. Here, what are you doing? Keep your hand out from under the hammer if you don't want it smashed!"

"Sorry!" Peter popped a bruised finger into his mouth and sucked it absently. "I was thinking. These master builders you talk about—what are they?"

As best he could, Brant told him. Peter drank it all in. There was more to this shipbuilding business than he had thought. But it could be learned, it could be learned!

That night he amazed Natalia by demanding a tutor.

"And get me a different monk this time," he ordered. "Not one who expects me to spend hours poring over church doctrine. I want to learn arithmetic and geometry and algebra."

Natalia turned pale. "Don't speak those words, Peter. Don't you know that it was because he had foreign books on those matters that my Uncle Artemon was held to be a sorcerer? I will not have you meddling with such things."

Peter's face sobered, as it always did at mention of the martyred Matveyev.

"I know, Mama darling. But we know, you and

I, that Uncle Artemon was no sorcerer, but simply a wise man in an ignorant world. I want to learn some of the things he learned. I've been ignorant too long."

"Well, if you will have it so." The mother sighed and gave in. "I can't feel that any good will come of it. Our own Russian monks would not be likely to know such things, but there are some Greeks at the Trinity Monastery. I'll ask Reverend Father to send one of them."

A tutor was sent, and Peter went to work. He was never a profound scholar, and he acquired little more than a smattering of mathematics. But he learned enough to help build ships, which was all he cared about.





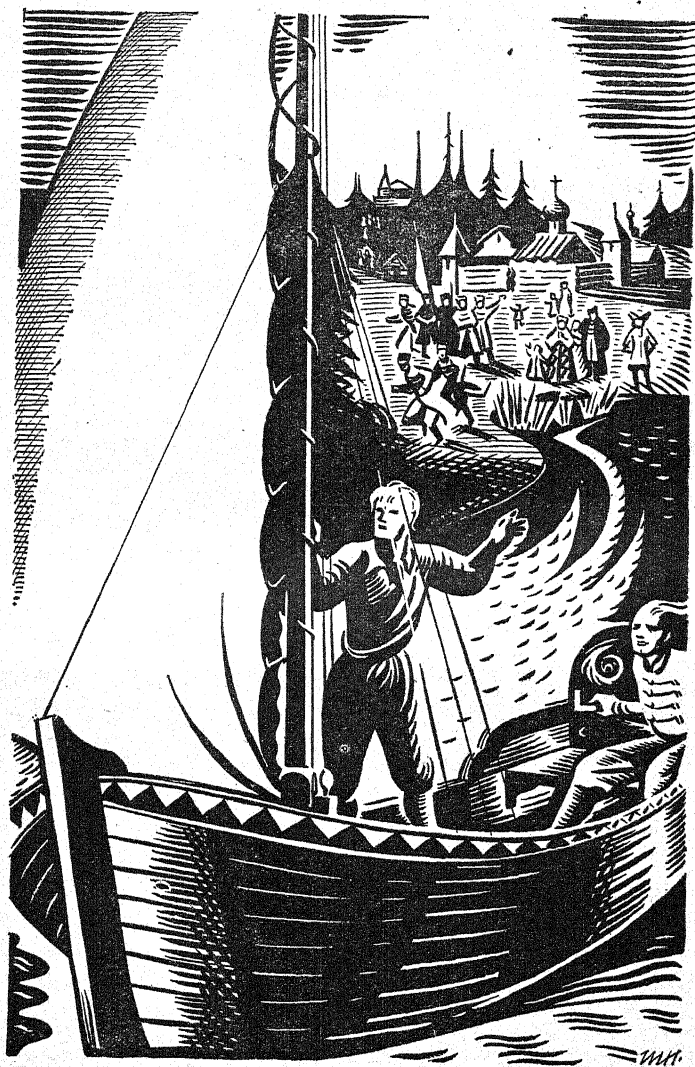
CHAPTER FOUR

THE TSAR WILL BUILD A BOAT

THEY finished the repairs and carried the English boat down to the nearest stream. Old Brant was something of a sailor, as every Dutchman must be. He rigged a sail, and taught the excited Peter how to steer.

The entire household had been summoned to the launching. The regimental band sounded a fanfare, the sail was hoisted and caught a fortunate breeze. Slowly, uncertainly zigzagging under the inexperienced hand at the tiller, the little craft moved off down the river. Peter's soldiers sent up a wild cheer.

To anyone with less enthusiasm than Peter, the voyage would have been disappointing. The little river was shallow and narrow. It was necessary for the boy soldiers to run along the bank and shove their master off when he ran aground. By the end of the day even Peter was obliged to admit that sail-



The little craft moved off down the river.

ing under such conditions had its drawbacks as a sport.

At dinner that night he declared he must have a bigger body of water to sail on.

"Not the Moskva River—Brant says its current is too swift. Brant says a lake would be best. A big lake, where I can get away from shore. Do you know where I could find a lake like that, Mama?"

"I do not," Natalia said decidedly. "There are no lakes in this part of the country. Now, for heaven's sake, Peter, let's talk of something else. It has been boats, boats, boats, until I'm sick of the sound of the word. You have your English boat, and you've upset the whole household all day, keeping us standing in the sun to watch you get from here to the edge of the forest. I could have walked the distance on dry land in half the time—yes, I could have crept there on my knees and still have reached the forest before you! Now let's hear no more of boats."

Sulkily Peter applied himself to his food. But later, as he sat scowling over his lessons, his brother Ivan came to him.

"I know where a big lake is, Petrushka," he offered. Peter sat erect. "You do? Where?"

"Beyond the Trinity Monastery. Miles and miles. I don't know how many. I lived at Trinity while Feodor was tsar, you know. We had the most delicious fish I've ever eaten. The cook told me they were caught fresh in this lake, Lake Pleshcheyev, he called it. He said it was as big as the ocean."

Peter caught and hugged him. "Thanks, a thousand thanks, brother! I must take my boat there. I'll start to-morrow."

"Will Mama let you?" asked simple Ivan.

It seemed unlikely, Peter admitted. On reflection, he decided not to take the matter up with Natalià just yet. But as soon as bedtime came he confided his hopes to young Danilovich Menshikov, who shared his room.

"The tsaritsa will never permit it," Danilovich declared. "She hates this boating craze of yours, Peter. She'll do nothing to encourage it."

"I know. How *can* old people be so unreasonable? Well, help me, Danilovich. We must think of some scheme."

"You could make a pilgrimage to the monastery," his friend suggested. "She'd like that. And once you were there, it shouldn't be so hard to get to the lake."

"Splendid! What would I do without you, Danilovich? But how about the boat? She'd want to know why I took a boat on pilgrimage."

"That's true. I guess my scheme's no good, after all." Young Menshikov yawned and spread out his bearskin beside Peter's bed. "I don't know why you want to bother with boats anyway. You have horses to ride, and carriages and litters. What do you want of boats?"

"Boats are best," Peter said positively. "Never mind, Danilovich, go to sleep if you like. I must think."

His thinking brought no result, so at the earliest opportunity he confided his problem to his friend Brant. The Dutchman agreed that a lake "as big as the ocean" was exactly what they wanted.

"But if your lady mother won't give her consent, I don't see how you could lug the English boat that far, Master Peter. We'd have to build a special cart for it, anyway. And it's hardly worth it, for she's not much of a boat, when all's said and done," the old man added.

"Not much of a boat! Brant, how can you say such a thing? She's the most wonderful boat in the world!"

"Master Peter, begging your pardon, she's nothing of the sort. I didn't want to hurt your feelings, since you had your heart set on her, but I begrudged every tap of the hammer. I'm not saying she wasn't a nice little boat in Queen Elizabeth's time, but boat-building has moved ahead in nearly two hundred years. You wouldn't see the king of England putting foot in a tub like that nowadays. No, that you wouldn't."

"Well, it's the only boat I've got," Peter said forlornly.

"True enough, but it needn't be. I was thinking, Master Peter. Why shouldn't I build you a new boat, a proper little Dutch yacht that'd be fit for the king you are? It could be done."

"Oh, Brant—what fun! You and I and Kort—of course we could do it! We'll go to this Lake Pleshcheyev and build it there. Could we start to-morrow?"

The old man shook his head. "To-morrow I begin the new stables on Prince Saltykov's estate. It'll take me into the summer, for skilled help is scarce. I couldn't think about boat-building for another two months, Master Peter."

"We'll see about that. If *I* want you, Saltykov can wait. But tell me, Brant, can you really build a boat, from the very beginning? I thought only a master builder could do that."

"I could do it all right. It'd be by rule of thumb, like, and I'm not saying there wouldn't be mistakes to correct. It's been thirty years since I worked at my proper trade, and I'm maybe a bit rusty. But give me time and plenty of timber to waste, and I could do it."

"I could help with the figuring, if I knew more," Peter said thoughtfully. "Maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea for you to get on with the Saltykov barns, Brant. My new tutor came the day before yesterday—he's going to teach me arithmetic and all those other things you said a master builder needed. Maybe," he laughed, "maybe by the time summer comes you can take a master builder with you to Pleshcheyev!"

Peter was not deceitful by choice. During the spring, whenever his dutiful application to study had especially pleased his mother, he cautiously sounded her out. Was there any reason why he shouldn't take Brant and Kort to Lake Pleshcheyev, and there build himself the boat of his dreams?

There were many reasons, she told him decidedly. Pressed to give them, she produced only one. "Because I forbid it!" Over and over he tried to persuade her, always to come up against that stone wall.

So after a while he spoke no more of lakes and boats. He studied very diligently, making the new

master, proud of him. He appeared promptly at family prayers, and discussed the saints with Ivan at table. Natalia, who had had reason to doubt Peter's piety, thanked heaven that at last her son was turning towards the light.

She was pleased and touched when Peter came to her in late June with the plea that he be allowed to make a pilgrimage to Trinity. June 29, St. Peter's day, was always marked by an elaborate festival at the monastery. Young Peter, who had been named for the saint, declared that it would make him very happy to attend the festival.

Natalia gladly consented. She gave the boy a bad moment by remarking that she, too, would benefit by the celebration. But Ivan's little daughter was ailing, and she finally decided a grandmother's care was needed at home.

It was something of a cavalcade that set off for the monastery in the clear June morning. Peter tried to hold his escort to simplicity, but Natalia's chamberlain had the last word on that. The tsar could not travel without a military escort, a valet to keep his wardrobe in order, special cooks, a physician, his personal priest, and a couple of dwarfs.

The dwarfs were there to amuse his majesty. Ivan the Terrible, who was not exactly a sunny person, had deigned to laugh at the antics of a dwarf slave sent him by the Khan of Krim. What was good enough for Ivan was good enough for his successors; thereafter there were always dwarfs at court. A peasant whose child suffered from a glandular deficiency retarding growth was in luck.

If by the age of sixteen the unfortunate youngster could still sleep in his baby cradle, his father could sell him to the court for a nice fat sum and live comfortably ever afterward.

Peter accepted the dwarfs as one more tiresome detail of a tsar's life. He did not find them particularly amusing, but it never occurred to him to dispense with them. There had always been dwarfs, just as there had always been a court chamberlain.

Ten foot soldiers escorted the party. There were two carriages, one for Peter and Menshikov, and one for the doctor and the priest. Everyone else travelled on foot, the lesser servants carrying the heavy luggage. Among the cook's helpers were Carsten Brant and Kort, burdened with large copper pots in which were concealed the tools of their trade.

The Trinity Monastery, lying forty miles to the north of Moscow, was reached at the end of the second day of travel. It was an immense moated castle, standing in deep forest. More than once Trinity's heavy fortifications had withstood siege. Sophia had taken refuge here when her streltzy revolted, and many a sovereign before her had found Trinity a safe haven in time of danger.

The Most Holy Abbot of Trinity received Peter with ceremonious homage. The young tsar presided graciously at table that night, but early in the morning he sought out his host.

"I am departing immediately on a private journey," Peter told him. "My suite will remain here. I trust that Your Reverence will make them comfortable."

"But, Sire, the festival! Has Your Majesty forgotten that to-morrow is St. Peter's Day?"

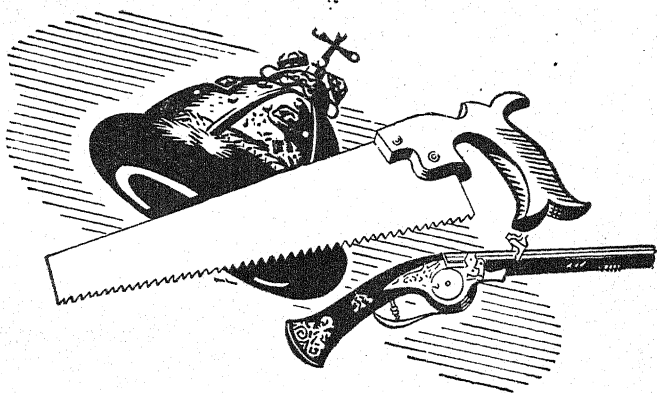
"I shall be sorry to miss it," Peter said curtly. "Will you have the kindness to procure three horses for me? I am taking two men."

"But, Your Majesty——! Is it permitted to ask where Your Majesty goes on this sudden journey?"

"It is not permitted." Peter turned on his heel.

Danilovich Menshikov, who had come along as valet, was left at the monastery. Danilovich, born to poverty and hard labour, saw no pleasure in roughing it, as Peter did. Besides, his shrewd wits were needed to cope with the abbot's inquisitiveness. Peter's instructions were to tell what lies he pleased, so that he did not reveal his master's whereabouts or the purpose of his journey.





CHAPTER FIVE

BESIDE THE LAKE

PETER and Brant and Kort rode fifty miles through thick forest, and came at last to a tiny logging camp on the shores of Lake Pleshcheyev. They commandeered a hut for themselves and a fine supply of timber, with a corps of husky labourers to bring in more. There was no mention of rank or titles. They were Master Peter and Master Brant, with well-lined pockets and eccentric notions.

Pleshcheyev was not as big as the ocean, but it was a fair-sized lake, and a very beautiful one. It lay in a cup among low hills covered with green birches, mixed with the darker green of lindens and the almost black pines. The shore was a meadowland sweet with lilies of the valley and waving reeds.

Peter and his friends slept rolled in skins on the mud floor of their hut. They rose at dawn to eat a hearty breakfast and get on with the job. There was no one to distract them, nothing to interfere with

the absorbing business of building a boat from the ground up. They sang as they worked, and talked and joked. When the day was over and the forest air struck chill, they built a mighty bonfire and sat around it, singing and laughing, passing a jug of vodka from hand to hand. Peter, drinking with hard-headed Dutchmen, found that even at sixteen he could hold his own.

The nightly bonfire consumed the day's mistakes. Old Brant, working by memory and by guesswork, was not finding the going easy. Peter's hastily acquired knowledge of mathematics could not always be relied upon, although he had brought his exercise books with him. But there was plenty of fine timber about, and all the time in the world, Peter thought. Even though the work proceeded slowly, he was having fun building his boat.

Timber to waste there was, but not time. The abbot of Trinity was not impressed by young Menshikov's ingenious inventions, having for many years dealt with boyar politicians. Brant had made some inquiries in the monastery kitchen about the road to the lake. The reverend gentleman questioned his cook and drew his own conclusions. He called a vigorous young monk and told him a horse was being saddled for him.

Peter and Brant and Kort, cheerfully hammering on the lake shore, never knew that keen eyes were watching them from a thicket of young birch trees. The monk, having satisfied himself that this was indeed his liege lord, clad in peasant blouse and cursing at a splinter in the royal thumb, returned to the monastery with the incredible tidings.



They built a mighty bonfire.

The good abbot took a day and a night for consideration. Trinity Monastery was the largest and richest of Russian holy places; its head held office by the favour of the tsar.

That Peter should conduct himself in such a manner was unquestionably a scandal, an outrage. The abbot swelled with fury as he reflected upon the glories of the St. Peter's day festival, all fallen flat and foolish because the tsar had taken himself off. And on his own name day, too! Surely heaven would not fail to punish such an affront.

Still, the abbot reflected cautiously, the tsar is the tsar. You can never tell, if you start rebuking your sovereign, what may come of it. Perhaps it would be safer to leave him to the vengeance of heaven.

The abbot tried leaving him to heaven for a few days, and found the solution most unsatisfactory. Peter's retainers, encouraged by the impish Menshikov, were disturbing the monastic peace. The doctor was a Protestant Dutchman who demanded meat on fast days, and the visiting priest disputed theological doctrine with the simple brothers. All of them blandly denied knowing anything about Peter's plans. Except for Menshikov, they probably spoke the truth. But they were very comfortable at the rich monastery, celebrated for its fine table. None of them seemed to care how long they stayed, or how unwelcome they were.

The abbot took another night and day of serious meditation, and this time he meditated to better purpose. He sent the doctor and the priest home to Natalia with a carefully worded letter. In it he told her where Peter was and what he was doing.

Natalia read the letter and went into a fit of hysterics.

It is difficult to understand why she so violently opposed Peter's having anything to do with water and boats. In everything else she indulged him without stint; she was ready to smother him in motherly devotion. But she was a superstitious woman, given to consulting fortune-tellers, as were most ladies of her time. There is a story that a gypsy woman presented herself at Peter's christening banquet, demanding wine. Natalia is said to have told her that water was good enough for gypsies. Whereupon the beggar cursed her and cried, "Water, water! By water this child is christened, and by water he shall die!"

The story is not a very likely one. Peter was christened in the Kremlin, whose sentries would scarcely have admitted a stray gypsy to the imperial banquet hall. As a matter of fact, Natalia only felt, although a little more strongly, what most Russians felt about water. An English diplomat's wife was asked in Moscow, "But how can you live on an island? Don't you feel *unsafe*, with water all around you?"

Whatever the basis for it, Natalia's fear of water for Peter was stubborn and very strong. She spent a fearful night after the abbot's letter came, picturing her son's body floating on Lake Pleshcheyev, drowned eyes accusing her. Early the next morning she sent a mounted messenger to him with a peremptory letter, commanding him to come home at once, "if you still live."

The letter reached Peter midway in his second

week at the lake, when the new boat was beginning to take shape. He sent the man back with a careless message. He was well; he would come home presently; love to all.

The next week she sent a file of soldiers. But the tsar, being their commander in chief, dismissed them with a stern command to bother him no more.

Like the reverend abbot, Natalia found herself forced to earnest reflection. There was time still to save her son, for her messengers had brought reassuring news. Not yet was this boat, this monstrous dangerous toy of Peter's delight, ready to launch upon the treacherous waves. Before it was finished she must—she would!—bring him back to her side.

It had rained all day, a heavy drenching down-pour making work in the open air impossible. Peter and his companions huddled around a miserable fire in their hut, grumpy and out of sorts in the enforced idleness. After five weeks of strenuous toil the yacht "St. Peter" was nearing completion. It was maddening to have to waste a day now.

The horseman who came splashing his way out of the wet woods was a Naryshkin uncle, brother to Natalia and to the dead Ivan. Leo Naryshkin was a grave, scholarly man, considered so wise in statecraft that even the Regent Sophia, who hated all Naryshkins, had been known to consult him. He was to become Peter's first prime minister. Natalia had chosen the one man of whom the defiant Peter stood in awe. He jumped to his feet, suddenly conscious of his soiled workman's shirt, of the primitive furnishings of the hut.

"Uncle Leo! Who would have expected you here—and on such a day! Come to the fire. I'm afraid it smokes a little; the rain got to our woodpile. Take this bench—no, not there, that's where the roof leaks. Well, this is a surprise!"

He bustled about, trying to cover his confusion. At a look from Brant, Kort hurried out to lead the visitor's horse to a shed. He did not come back. Old Brant had risen also, and stood respectfully, hiding his pipe behind his back.

"This is my friend Carsten Brant, Uncle. He's helping me build a boat."

"So I have heard." Leo Naryshkin threw aside his dripping cloak and took the offered seat. "Your mother has sent me a confidential message, Peter. Perhaps we could be alone?"

"Why, yes, Uncle, of course. Brant!"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

With an awkward bow the old carpenter ducked out of the door. He closed it behind him and clumped off to the boat. There was nowhere else to go.

Crouching in its shelter, he pulled morosely on his cold pipe. This was the first of the autumn rains. More would follow. It was over, the mellow sunlit summer, with its long days of willing toil and hearty good-fellowship. "Master Peter"—aye, there was a companion you wouldn't find the like of again. Strong as an ox, and willing. Yes, and quick to learn. Always with a laugh and a joke on his lips. If a man could choose his son, a lad to work with and hand down his craft, it'd be a boy like Master Peter he'd pick.

Well, all that was over now. This fine gentleman in the velvet cloak would stand no nonsense, anyone could see that. He'd come to fetch the boy back to his palace, to the silken sheets and the golden spoons. A promising shipwright spoiled to make a tsar, and a shocking waste of talent that was, if you asked Carsten Brant. Any fool could be a tsar; there was nothing to such a job. But Peter could have been a master builder, that he could.

Old Brant felt a tear trickling down his nose. Dutch pipes were hard to come by in Moscow, and his had served him well. But he threw it from him, taking bitter pleasure in the sound of it splintering against a stone. "Very good, Your Majesty!" he said aloud, mimicking the high voice of the court chamberlain. Then he swore savagely in honest Dutch, and felt worse rather than better after it.

"But, Uncle, another week—two more weeks at most will see it finished!" Peter pleaded. "Surely these affairs of state can wait that long?"

Leo Naryshkin shook his head. "I have given you your mother's words, Peter. You are tsar. You have duties as well as privileges. Your mother requires your immediate presence to deal with an official matter which cannot be postponed."

"But what *is* it? I don't understand, Uncle. I may be tsar, but I have nothing to do with public affairs. Sophia and Golitzyn see to it that I'm kept out of such things."

"They can't keep you out of this one, Peter. Nor can they attend to it in your stead. It concerns you alone, and it will not wait."

"But surely you can tell me what it is?"

"I'm sorry, Peter. I promised your mother you should hear it from her own lips."

"Well——" Peter looked helplessly into his uncle's calm face. It had never been of any use to try coaxing Uncle Leo, he remembered. "If this is just a whim of my mother's, I won't stir," he said.

"It's not a whim, Peter. As I told you, it's a matter of state. It concerns your duty as tsar."

"My *official* duty?"

"Your official duty."

Peter sighed. "Then I'll have to go. I'll leave Brant and Kort to get on with the yacht. And I warn you now, I'll be back here the minute I'm through with this mysterious duty you speak of."





CHAPTER SIX

A BRIDE FOR PETER

THE important matter of state for which Peter had been summoned home was not immediately disclosed to him. He found the household in an uproar of preparation for the festival of St. Natalia. The "name day," or day of the saint for whom one was named, was celebrated by the bearer of the name as a second birthday.

The name day of the Tsaritsa Natalia was an occasion for national rejoicing. Even Sophia, not in great favour with the church and anxious to give no further offence, joined in the celebration. The Preobrazhensk household moved temporarily into the Kremlin palace, where their welcome, if chilly, was at least civil.

When the great day came Natalia rose at five for the first of the special masses. She visited thirteen churches during the day and stood for the long services. Russian churches contained no pews, and though a chair was sometimes placed behind the gauze curtain shielding a royal lady, on this important occasion Natalia chose to stand, kneel, and prostrate herself in the ordinary way.

Peter presided at the evening banquet in her name, but Natalia went around with a glass of vodka for each noble guest before she retired to the women's apartments to feast their wives. During the entire day and evening she wore a robe so heavy with gold and gems that it weighed forty pounds.

It must have been an exhausting experience. Very likely she did not feel at her best the following day. Peter was not surprised to find her in bed when he went to wish her good-morning. She spoke to him in a feeble, suffering voice, and her ladies-in-waiting hurried him from the room.

He had meant to go back to the lake that very day, but only a heartless son could have left the poor lady in such a state. The court doctor, hastily summoned, was admitted to the darkened chamber, and allowed to feel the patient's pulse through a silk shawl. Any sort of physical examination which involved actually touching the royal feminine body would have been the height of impropriety. No such rule existed when the royal patient was male, and it reflects no credit upon the state of Russian medicine to know that tsars' daughters usually outlived tsars' sons.

In Natalia's case it made little difference. She was not ill, but was simply employing a common maternal artifice to keep her son by her side. She had no difficulty in getting the doctor to prescribe complete rest and no disturbing emotions.

Peter, whose devotion to his mother was very deep, rode beside her carriage on the return to Preobrazhensk. For three weeks she kept him kicking his heels about the place, bringing her fresh

nosegays every morning, reading aloud to her, tip-toeing in and out of the sick-room under the admonishing whispers of her attendants.

September had nearly gone when Natalia languidly left her bed. The autumn rains were sluicing down in earnest now. Winter comes early to northern Russia; already servants were cramming wood into the tiled stoves which heated the draughty palace.

Natalia sat at the window in her armchair, wrapped in sables. Peter crouched his great length on a stool at her feet.

"It's wonderful to see you up again, Mama darling," he said fondly. "Really, you gave me a fright I'll never forget."

Natalia patted his head. "It's sweet to hear you say that, Petrushka. I'd begun to think you didn't care whether your poor mother lived or died. Running away like that and leaving me to eat my heart out with worry. How could you be so cruel, Peter?"

"I'm sorry, Mama." He stirred uneasily. "I don't see why you worried. I was perfectly safe at the lake. When I go back——"

"Peter! You aren't going back!"

His jaw set. "Certainly I'm going back. What did you think?"

"I thought——" she swallowed painfully, "I thought when once you were home, you'd stay with me."

"Well, I won't," he said sulkily. "I wouldn't have come at all if you hadn't sent Uncle Leo with a wild tale of a pressing 'affair of state' that made it my duty to come. I know now that was just an excuse.

I was a fool not to see through it. Next time I'll know better."

With a sigh Natalia braced herself to conflict. "It was no excuse, Peter. Had it not been for my illness, I would have discussed it with you before. It *is* a matter of great importance, and it does involve your duty as tsar. Your most sacred duty, Peter; one which the Russian people expect you to fulfill."

"Well? Let's have it, Mama."

She hesitated, and then she said simply, "You must marry, my son."

He stared at her. "Are you mad, Mother? I'm only sixteen."

"And you are over six feet tall, broad-shouldered and strong. The Romanovs grow up early, Peter. It is time we found you a wife."

"But I don't want a wife!" he exclaimed childishly. "I can't imagine what put such a silly idea into your head."

"You have claimed a man's right to act for yourself," she reminded him. "A child, a dutiful son, would have asked his mother's permission before embarking on that heartless expedition to the lake. If you are old enough for such decisions, you are old enough to marry."

In the midst of his protests, she sent for Leo Naryshkin. Gravely the uncle explained the situation to him.

The regency, never popular, was causing increasing discontent among the people. The Russians did not understand the idea of a substitute tsar; they wanted a ruler acting in his own right. And it was common talk in Moscow that Sophia was boldly

preparing to capitalise this feeling by declaring herself empress.

If Peter were a married man, head of his own household, it would be more difficult for Sophia to thrust him aside as a mere child. If by good fortune he became the father of a son, his position would be greatly strengthened. The throne was a man's job; few Russians looked with favour upon female rulers. Peter as tsar, with a lusty son to ensure the succession, would be sure of support so strong that Sophia would be helpless against him.

Peter's objections could not stand up against Naryshkin's reasoning and his mother's persuasion. Now that the idea was becoming familiar to him, he was not so sure he did object.

His childhood dislike of Sophia had hardened, after the horror of the streltzy mutiny, into genuine hatred. He was the tsar. He was quite willing to share his throne with poor foolish Ivan, but he had no intention of being forced from it by Sophia's intrigues. If his taking a wife would checkmate his sister's plans—then it was well worth while.

It was not until the issue had been thus happily settled that Peter thought to put a question.

"Who is she, Mama?"

"She? What do you mean, my son?"

"This girl I'm supposed to marry. You haven't told me her name."

"Oh!" Natalia laughed. "Why, that isn't settled yet, dear. Your wife will be chosen in the usual manner. We'll send couriers throughout the land, asking all the boyars with daughters of suitable age to send them to us. Then we can choose at leisure."

Peter shuddered. "A house full of giggling, squealing girls—what could be more horrible? I'll tell you, Mama. I'll go on back to the lake. You and Uncle Leo can choose her. Find me one who likes boats, if you can," he added hopefully.

Natalia compressed her lips. "We will find you a maiden who is modest, healthy, and religious. Nothing more is required. But you must be here, Peter. The boyars would be deeply insulted if you turned your back on their daughters."

"Well, you'll have to hurry, then. Why must we send all over Russia? There are plenty of nice girls here in Moscow. Any of them will do."

"We must follow the custom," Natalia said tranquilly. "A matter of such importance cannot be hurried."

The cold autumn rain beat against the mica-paned windows. Peter saw his mother glance towards the ruined garden, its shrubs already stripped and forlorn. In his mind suspicion changed to certainty.

"It will be too late for boat-building by the time this is all over! The lake freezes in late October, they told us. Mother, you've done this on purpose. So that I couldn't go back!"

"Nonsense!" Uncle Leo interposed briskly. "Are you blaming your poor mother for her illness, boy? And as for the business of your marriage, I myself have explained to you why it cannot wait. It is time for you to put away childish things and take your place before the world as a man. A man, Peter, and a tsar!"

For a long silent moment the boy looked from his uncle's face to his mother's, and back again.

"Very well," he said at last. "I will stay here. I will marry. But next spring, when the ice melts, I'm going back to the lake. Not a wife nor anything else shall keep me from building my boat!"

The word went out that night. One Moscow father, acting on the early-bird principle, managed to have his lovely daughter on the Preobrazhensk door-step when the morrow's dawn broke. Two or three Moscow beauties arrived later in the day. Others followed, and by the end of the week the candidates from the provinces were arriving.

The palace took on the aspect of a boarding school. The young ladies were lodged in the women's quarters, but they overflowed the balconies and gardens, strumming on balalaikas, singing tender ballads, and keeping up a pretty pretence that they were there simply as carefree house guests of the dear tsaritsa.

Peter had no prejudice against girls, as more than one comely village maid could testify. But a hastily snatched kiss in the orchard was one thing; playing the court gallant to a group of high-born damsels was quite another. All his life he was to be ill at ease in the company of ladies of fashion. He masked this shyness with an affection of boorishness which rather attracted than repelled. The prospective brides found him altogether charming, and pouted sweetly when he fled their society to take refuge with his soldiers.

The Preobrazhenski regiment had had an easy time of it while their commander was away. Now they were put to work. Peter discovered that his

new carpentering skill could be applied to building other things than boats. He designed and helped erect a wooden fort on the estate. Sham battles were held, fought with live ammunition and with such vigour that several men were injured and one was killed by a cannon ball.

Natalia and Uncle Leo were not sorry to have the bridal choice left to them. The business was a serious one. They were choosing not the girl herself, for she was of no consequence whatever, but the noble family whose alliance would be most desirable. In long earnest talks they weighed the rival merits of the Kurakins, the Saltykovs, the Ramodonavskys. Money was no consideration to the fabulously rich Romanovs, but political and church influence was.

In the end they settled upon the house of Lopukhin, represented by a girl named Eudoxia. The Lopukhins, besides being a fine old conservative family with members in high ecclesiastical office, were related to half a dozen other families of equal consequence. All of these families, with a kinswoman on the throne, would find it to their interest to support Peter in any difficulty Sophia might bring about.

Eudoxia was three years older than Peter, being then almost twenty. She had a heavy blotched face with extremely bushy eyebrows, and a thick-waisted stocky figure which in later years turned to a mountain of fat. No one could have called her attractive, but she was modest, obviously healthy, and pious to the point of bigotry. Natalia found her stipulations fulfilled in every particular. She was therefore able to announce to Peter that his bride had been chosen.

There is a legend that the young tsar exclaimed,

"What, that one?" when his mother pointed Eudoxia out in a group on the terrace. But he did not seriously protest. He was not in love with anyone else. His mother and uncle had convinced him that a speedy marriage was desirable. Eudoxia would do as well as another.

The marriage was celebrated in the Kremlin cathedral on January 27, 1689, five months before Peter's seventeenth birthday. Within two months, he left his new wife to her own devices and set out for Lake Pleshcheyev.

Old Brant and Kort welcomed him with tears of joy. They had heard of his marriage, and had taken it for granted that he would never come back to them. But, since he had ordered it, they had gone ahead with the work.

They had great things to show him. Not only was the first boat done, the little yacht upon which all three had worked throughout the summer, but they had laid the keel of a new and bigger one.

Joyously Peter took up his tools again. However, Natalia and Eudoxia between them managed to summon him home within two weeks. He pacified them and returned. They had finished the second boat when another summons came, this time from Leo Naryshkin.

Political events of grave importance demanded his presence, Uncle Leo wrote. This was no subterfuge of an anxious mother, but the literal truth.

Peter hurried back to Moscow, leaving Brant to the beginning of yet a third boat. It was to be two years before he found leisure to return.



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STRUGGLE WITH SOPHIA

THE Princess Regent and her minister had made their fatal mistake. So long as they kept the country at peace and reasonably prosperous, Russia grumbled but endured them. But now they had managed to involve themselves in a war. And worse, it was a war ending in melancholy failure.

Russia and Poland had long disputed possession of Little Russia, or the Ukraine, with its important city of Kiev. Prince Golitzyn, by some really brilliant diplomatic manœuvring, induced Poland to surrender her Ukrainian claims. A condition of the treaty was that Russia should join with the other Christian powers against the Turks.

This was the period when it looked as though the Moslems would overrun all Europe. They were turned back at Vienna just before Golitzyn joined the Holy League of Poland, Austria, and the Venetian Republic. But the danger was not yet over. Just

south of the Ukraine was Crimea, a Turkish dependency inhabited by Moslem Tartars. Poland especially feared invasion from that direction.

It was agreed that Russia should attack the Tartars, while the other members of the League continued the war in Turkey proper. The Crimea was to be Russia's job.

Poland, Austria, and Venice, acting together, did very well, eventually forcing the Turks back to the Balkan peninsula. But Russia, left to shift for herself, might as well have had no allies. It was an all-Russian army that Prince Golitzyn led into Crimea, and his allies' successes on another front were no help to him.

The prince had had no military experience. He was so unpopular with the army that boyar officers rode out of Moscow with their horses draped in mourning. He undertook the campaign reluctantly, urging that it would be far better to put some experienced general in command. Sophia, however, was determined that her favourite should win military glory.

Everything went wrong from the start. The streltzy could not be used, because Sophia claimed she needed them in Moscow for her own protection. The Russian regular army was small. To increase it, the officers were commanded to bring in a stated number of serfs from their estates. These men were agricultural labourers, untrained in war. The officers, holding military rank as a social distinction, knew little more.

One hundred thousand men were gathered together, and set out for Crimea. They never even

saw the enemy. The Tartars burned the grasslands behind them and melted away into the interior. Left without fodder for their horses, the Russians were helpless. Sickness broke out among them, taking some forty thousand lives. Golitzyn turned about and ingloriously led his foot-sore mob back to Moscow.

They tried another expedition the following year. This time the preparations were better. They did reach and take an insignificant Tartar town. But they were unable to hold it. Again they suffered from want of supplies. Again they were obliged to return to Moscow with nothing accomplished but the loss of fifty-five thousand men. Not all of these men died. Twenty thousand of them deserted.

Back in Moscow, Sophia dared not admit a second defeat. With great audacity she prepared to give it the appearance of victory. The taking of Perekop, a small town of which the Russians had never heard, and from which Golitzyn's forces had eventually been expelled, was built up into a magnificent triumph.

Sophia announced that when the "conquering army" returned home a time of rejoicing was to be observed. She, with her brothers the tsars, would publicly crown the hero Golitzyn with laurels, bestowing upon him at the same time the highest military order of the realm.

It was for this celebration of defeat masked as victory that Peter was recalled from his boat building. The time was July, 1689.

Peter's old friend General Gordon, the Scots officer who had once supplied him with drummer boys,

had commanded the rear-guard of the retreating army. From him the young tsar learned the whole shameful story. He told Sophia flatly that he would be no party to the fraud.

Sophia, with the submissive Ivan, carried out her plan. The celebration was held; Golitzyn was publicly thanked by his two sovereigns. The third one, Peter, was not present.

The situation had reached a crisis now. Sophia had made herself ruler in fact; she was ready for the final stroke which should give her the title as well. Already, in anticipation, she had had her portrait painted in royal robes, with the orb and crown.

She had built up the streltzy into a personal army, buying their devotion by generous gifts of money and liquor. She could count upon her family, the powerful Miloslavskis, and she believed that the head of the church, the Patriarch Joachim, would support her. Peter's refusal to honour Golitzyn for his "victory" could be twisted into an insult to the army he had led. Altogether it seemed to Sophia that this was the time to strike.

On August 15, 1689, Peter went unannounced to the Kremlin. His purpose was to visit an old aunt, a nun at one of the convents within the walls.

He found the Kremlin swarming with streltzy soldiers. He estimated that there were at least six hundred of them in evidence. Since their barracks were in a distant part of the city, and only a fraction of that number was required for the usual guard duty, Peter's suspicions were aroused. He went

directly to his sister and asked her the reason for their presence.

Sophia answered that she was planning a pilgrimage, and would need the men as escort. She refused to explain why a peaceful religious pilgrimage should require such armed strength. She was very evasive as to where and when she meant to go.

Peter returned to Preobrazhensk in a very thoughtful mood. He consulted with uncle Leo Naryshkin, who called other Naryshkins into council, as well as men of the Lopukhin family into which Peter had married. To all of them it seemed evident that Sophia was about to move. They began to look to the forces they could muster to oppose her.

The Preobrazhenski regiment had long outgrown its wooden guns. It had outgrown the stable quarters, too, and was now billeted in regular barracks on the estate. A second regiment had been formed in the neighbouring village of Semenov. The average age of the soldiers was twenty. They were a well-armed, well-trained troop of fighting men. They were bound to Peter, not by gifts and flattery, but by strong ties of loyalty going back into boyhood. Peter had every reason to trust them, for not a man among them was ever to forsake or betray him.

Leo Naryshkin had his spies inside the Kremlin. Two nights after Peter's discovery of the gathering troops one of these spies rode full speed to Preobrazhensk with the news that the streltzy had received their marching orders. They were to advance upon the suburban palace, put Peter and his uncle to death, make prisoners of his wife and mother.

The messenger arrived shortly after midnight. The household, suddenly aroused from sleep, was thrown into confusion. It was not considered possible to defend the palace, an ordinary country house without fortifications. Instead, the two regiments formed themselves about the carriage of Natalia and the young Tsaritsa Eudoxia and set out for Trinity Monastery. Peter rode ahead to demand protection of the abbot.

They reached the monastery in safety. Sophia's legions did not march on Preobrazhensk that night; probably because she also had her spies in Peter's household. But a streltzy colonel, with fifty men, turned up at the monastery a few hours after the tsar's party reached it. He brought copies of the secret order signed by the regent, commanding the destruction of Peter and all the Naryshkins and Lopukhins, including Natalia and Eudoxia.

This streltzy colonel was only the first of the rats eager to leave Sophia's sinking ship. He told Peter that the entire corps was sick of Sophia's domination; anxious to transfer their allegiance to one who was, after all, their anointed tsar. He said that if Peter would order the main body to come to him at the monastery they would obey.

Peter, properly contemptuous of such support, called upon the regular army instead. Sophia told General Gordon that he would lose his head if he attempted to join Peter. The general managed it, however, escaping not only with his head but with a good part of the Moscow garrison.

Sophia then sent the Patriarch Joachim to reason with Peter, to tell him that she meant him no harm,

but had only assembled her guard to escort her on a religious pilgrimage. The high priest, however, once safely inside the monastery, did not carry out her orders. Joachim had been affronted by Sophia's high-handed interference in church matters; and Eudoxia, Peter's wife, was a distant cousin of his. He declared himself on Peter's side, electing to remain at Trinity with him.

It was at Joachim's urging that Peter finally sent a message to the streltzy, summoning them to his service. They responded as the colonel and Joachim had predicted. Almost to a man they obeyed, leaving Sophia in the Kremlin with a very small force.

Prince Golitzyn now made the picture complete by presenting himself at the monastery. He denied that there had been any plot to kill Peter, and there is strong evidence that Sophia had not taken him into her confidence. The prince said he asked only to serve Peter as faithfully and as competently as he had served the regent.

It was true that except for the disastrous Crimean campaigns Golitzyn had a good record of accomplishment. He had also a cousin, Boris, who was a colonel in the Preobrazhenskis and Peter's good friend. Boris pleaded on his cousin's behalf. In the end Prince Golitzyn was granted his life, but stripped of his estates and banished to the far North.

It remained now only to deal with Sophia. Early in September Peter wrote an affectionate letter to Ivan, who was in the Kremlin with her, saying that the time had now come for the two brothers to fulfill their coronation promises and rule Russia for Russia's good. Their sister Sophia, he wrote, had

usurped their just powers, and must now be required to surrender them.

To Sophia herself Peter sent, not a letter, but a messenger. It was the tsar's wish, the envoy told her, that she go to the Novodevichii Convent outside the city, there to end her life in honourable retirement. She was not required to take any religious vows. Well-furnished rooms would be prepared for her, and she would be paid a generous allowance.

Sophia had no choice but to submit. Nine years later, after she had incited the streltzy to another uprising, her brother compelled her to take the veil. As the nun Susannah she remained in the convent until her death in 1704.

On October 16, 1689, Peter entered the Kremlin. His brother Ivan received him warmly. Then, arrayed in his robes of state, he stood at the top of the Red Staircase. The boyars, the army and streltzy officers, the city merchants, and the clergy filed up the staircase to kneel and kiss his hand.

It is doubtful whether in its long history the Red Staircase had supported a more truly royal figure. Peter, not yet eighteen, had reached his full height of six feet eight, with breadth in proportion. His dark curling hair, worn long, framed a ruddy bronzed face with sparkling black eyes. Laughter came more readily to that face than frowns, but Peter could be stern, too. More than one of those men who knelt at his feet were to die by his command. Some of them were to die horribly, after fearful torture. Peter had seen good men die that

way, his young uncle Ivan and the scientist Matveyev. That sight had put steel into the soul of the boy tsar. Never, throughout all his long reign, might any man he believed evil hope for a softer fate.

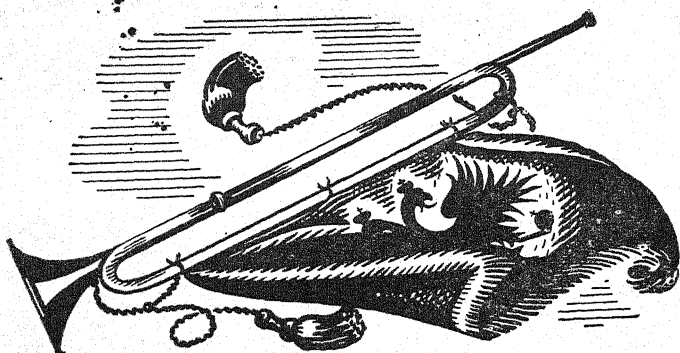
The reign that began there on the steps in 1689 was to endure for thirty-five years. It was to bring changes, the very thought of which would have horrified the cheering subjects into speechlessness.

Peter came to the throne of a country Oriental in outlook, land-locked, shut-in, having little communication with the outside world and wanting none. It was a land of ancient traditions, where "the way of our fathers" was the measure of excellence. If a custom was old, it was Russian, and therefore perfect. If it was new, then it was foreign, or "German," the Russian term for all foreigners, and consequently worthless.

Peter was to change all that, and bring his country into the European sisterhood of nations. It would not be easy.

A long road lay ahead for Russia on that October day. But the smiling young giant on the staircase meant to set her on that way. He meant to see that, in sweat and blood, in toil and tears, she followed her path to greatness.





CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BEGINNINGS OF NEW RUSSIA

TSAR ALEXIS, Peter's father, had had trouble with foreigners. They had been filtering into Russia for the past century, coming in various ways. Some of them were prisoners of war from the Baltic shores, who remained in the country of their captivity by choice. There had been a wave of French Huguenots, refugees from religious persecution. Germans and Britons came to trade and settled down in Moscow and in the northern port of Archangel. These men did a large export business and became rich.

In addition, the Russian army attracted a number of soldiers of fortune anxious for one reason or another to get away from their home lands. General Patrick Gordon had supported the claims of the Stuarts to the British throne and had escaped to Russia with a price on his head. Many of the regular army officers were foreign refugees, some of them because of offences less pardonable than Gordon's.

There was always prejudice in old Russia against these strangers from "outside." They wore outlandish clothes, they had odd social customs, they worshipped in heretical faiths. Particularly, they were accused of having no control over their women, who went unveiled about the streets and sat at table with men, "as though they thought themselves equals."

Such scandalous conduct provoked hostile demonstrations from time to time. Alexis, after a series of riots, established a foreign quarter in which the strangers were required to live.

This "German suburb," as it was called, lay to the north-east of Moscow, on the road to Preobrazhensk. It was a pleasant place of wooden houses surrounded by flower gardens, very attractive to the young tsar. Peter, with a strong liking for foreigners, began to spend a great deal of time there.

Everything he saw delighted him. The new, clean little houses with sunlight pouring in through crisp white curtains were a revelation after the dim canopied palace chambers. It was the Russian custom to overcome stuffiness by sprinkling perfume liberally about the rooms, but these "Germans" boldly opened doors and windows to let fresh air in.

Peter, carried away by his enthusiasm, rashly attempted to introduce this foreign notion of fresh air into the Kremlin palace. He met stubborn opposition, not only from his mother, but from his young wife. "Such were not the ways of our fathers," they told him, thus disposing of the matter.

Peter, always willing to humour his mother, was beginning to find Eudoxia extremely difficult. The

young lady's piety, which had been recommended as a virtue, passed all reasonable bounds. She roused the entire household at four every morning for early Mass in the palace chapel. At nine they must go to the cathedral for a second service lasting two hours. There was a two-hour vesper service in the chapel at four, and family prayers at bedtime.

These were the observances of an ordinary week-day. Sundays and the numerous holy days brought increased hours of devotion. It was not a matter of sitting comfortably to hear a sermon. Worshippers, unless they had received a special dispensation, stood when they did not kneel. The services were marked by a series of "prostrations," throwing the whole body at full length before a sacred picture. So great was Eudoxia's zeal that she is said to have made as many as a thousand prostrations in one day of Lent.

The young tsaritsa had her personal priest, or confessor as he was called, living in the palace. She consulted Father Ignateyev on every slightest detail of her daily life. Whatever he disapproved she was able to brand as sacrilege, a sin of which she was fanatically resolved never to be guilty. Everything new, every innovation such as the introduction of fresh air, came under this heading.

It is necessary here to make a distinction between the Russian Orthodox faith and its administration by the Moscow clergy. The religion itself, one of the oldest forms of Christianity, is a strong, simple creed of great spiritual beauty. It is a living faith to-day, the comfort and inspiration of millions. It comforted and inspired millions in Peter's time, himself not the least of them. Peter was born in

the Church and died in it. He never at any time had any quarrel with true religion.

He did quarrel, and to good effect, with those churchmen who used their spiritual position to worldly advantage. Unfortunately he was surrounded by them. The higher ecclesiastical circles in the capital made up what was in effect a political machine, conscienceless and corrupt, greedy for wealth and power. Joined with the powerful boyars, they formed a solid block in defence of their ancient privileges, unalterably opposed to any reforms. This was the enemy that Peter fought all his days. This was the enemy which gained complete supremacy over his young wife.

Peter was slow to realise this. His mother was a pious woman; poor foolish Ivan was forever babbling of the saints. The late Tsar Alexis had established, or passed on, the custom of family prayers. Peter quite expected religious observances to absorb a good part of his waking hours. He had not, however, bargained for the complete giving over of day and night to religion which Eudoxia sought to enforce.

At last he remonstrated good-naturedly. Only a monk, he told her, could afford to devote his entire life to prayer. He was no monk, but the Tsar of Russia, with business to do in this world.

Eudoxia wept, and fled to Father Ignatyev for counsel. He sternly reminded her that the soul of her husband must be her first concern. If Peter were lax in his duties, then she, his devoted wife, must redouble her prayers to win heavenly pardon for him.

Whatever slight chance of married happiness they

might have had was lost now. In the end, Peter evaded most of the services by spending his time outside the palace. Eudoxia prayed and wept, and at every opportunity preached him a sermon. Her swollen, streaming eyes and bitter words were not attractive to the young man who loved gaiety and good-fellowship. More and more he went to the "German" quarter, where he could be sure of finding them.

Ministers from the European courts had their homes in the suburb. They were flattered to welcome him. The Danish envoy, a M. de Hoorn, was an especially pleasant host. He had a secretary, a young Swiss named Francis Lefort.

Peter met Lefort early in 1690, a few months after he had deposed Sophia and assumed active control of the government. He was already planning his first great work, the building up of a modern army. He had enlisted the help of General Patrick Gordon; now, by great good fortune, he found a second helper who was to prove invaluable.

These two men, Gordon and Lefort, contributed immeasurably to Peter's glory. They understood and sympathised with his purpose when he was only a raw, untried boy, about to pit himself against the powerful force of entrenched conservatism. They were practical men with practical knowledge of modern European methods. Gordon was primarily the soldier, but Lefort, although he had served in the French and Dutch armies, had commercial experience, too.

Gordon was fifty-five in 1690. Lefort was in his early thirties. Fortunately, when Peter brought

them together they took an instant liking to each other.

They were different in temperament; the older man grave and a little severe, Lefort frivolous and witty. However, they shared one characteristic with each other, and with their royal patron. All three were hearty, two-fisted drinkers.

Vodka flowed like water in all-night sessions at Gordon's house. Small wonder that Eudoxia found it difficult to arouse her lord for four-o'clock Mass. She did not fail to bring up the subject of evil companions and intemperance in her dinner-table lectures, with the result that more and more Peter found it convenient to dine elsewhere.

Nights of revelry did not interfere with days of hard work. With the Preobrazhenski and its sister regiment as a nucleus, Peter began the building of a real army.

Every great noble of the court was now required to furnish for the army as many men as he habitually employed for his own body-guard. The number of armed retainers a boyar kept was strictly determined according to rank, and ranged from two hundred men downward to a mere eighty. Since their only function was to clear the streets when their lords rode forth, they were rather ornaments than fighting men. They wore chain armour, gilded if their lord were rich enough, and were armed with pikes. They gave a beautiful glittering touch to holiday processions.

To violent protests that he would strip the nobles of their guards of honour, Peter replied that he had no such intention. He did not demand the guards

themselves, but only an equivalent number of men. And for every man there must be a horse.

This high-handed order did not please the nobility. Another, soon to follow, pleased them even less.

It was the custom that young men of aristocratic families should hold officers' commissions as a mark of rank. Peter decreed now that these commissions must be resigned, and that the young men must enlist as common soldiers. This was that they might benefit fully from the new technique about to be introduced.

When a roar of protest went up, Peter set the example by enrolling himself as a "bombardier," the old word for artilleryman. The young boyars were promoted as rapidly as their ability permitted, some of them becoming colonels within six months of enlistment. Peter, however, having reached the rank of sergeant, declared that it suited him very well. He remained a sergeant until the Swedish war.

Since the days of Alexis, Gordon had striven vainly to introduce some sort of military system into the Russian army. Because of opposition by boyar officers, wedded to the ways of their fathers, he had accomplished little. Now at last he had a free hand. Aided by a handful of other foreigners, Dutch, German, and French, he overhauled the entire structure. The ancient outmoded weapons were melted down; forges were set up to turn out new ones. The men were mercilessly drilled, discipline was tightened, graft and petty favouritism reduced.

The process took time, and it had its difficulties. Russian soldiers had led a pleasant, shiftless life, whiling away long hours in barracks by dancing,

drinking, and gambling. It was not easy to change them.

Peter made it easier by introducing as many foreigners as possible into the ranks. Large numbers of French Protestants, deprived of protection by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, had found sanctuary in Russia. Voltaire, the great French writer, estimates that as many as four thousand of these were scattered through Peter's new legion. Their boasting of the perfection of Louis XIV's army was very useful in stinging the Russians to perfect their own.

The reshaping of the army occupied nearly two years of Peter's time. During those two years he accomplished a number of reforms in other fields. He found the law courts in a disgraceful state, with bribery of judges the accepted practice. He discharged two hundred judges, replacing them with men he at least hoped would prove honest. Some of them did. He increased foreign trade by lowering tariffs. And he founded Moscow's first fire department.

Moscow, proudly calling herself "the white stone city," derived the title only from a few public buildings and churches. Practically all the shops and dwelling houses of the middle and lower classes were of logs, their chinks stuffed with dried moss against the winter cold.

Water was drawn from wells or hauled in barrels from the Moskva River, so that any sort of effective fire fighting was impossible. Every winter disastrous fires broke out, sweeping from house to

house. The great Kremlin wall enclosing the principal buildings was there not alone to protect them against a human enemy, but against the danger of fire.

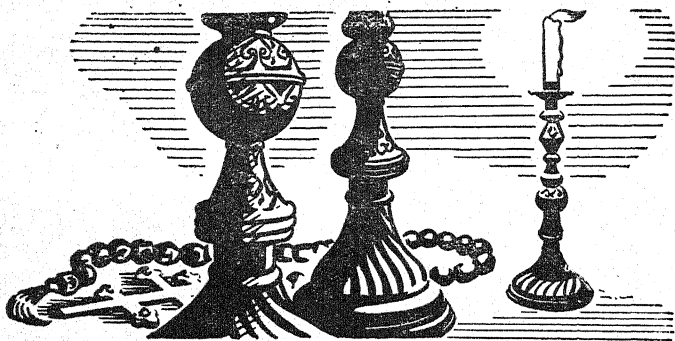
Just before the beginning of Lent in 1690 Eudoxia gave birth to her first child, a boy. It was already carnival time, a season of rejoicing, so the happy event was celebrated uproariously throughout the city. Peter treated his subjects to such an exhibition of fireworks as they had never seen before. A flaming rocket fell upon a workman's house some distance from the Kremlin, and set the whole quarter ablaze. Before it burned itself out, two thousand homes had been destroyed, with a considerable loss of life.

Peter went in person to the scene of the disaster. During the three days and nights the fire raged he never rested. He plunged into flaming houses, carrying out women and children, risking his own life a hundred times over. He sent to the palace for aid in tending the wounded, and his mother and Ivan's wife came. Eudoxia refused even to spare one servant, sending word that fire was the instrument by which the Lord chastised Peter for neglecting his prayers.

The fire department which Peter organised after the disaster might more properly be called a demolition squad. Without any water supply, it was hopeless to try to extinguish a fire. The department was equipped to destroy surrounding buildings and dig trenches, so as to confine the flames to a limited area. It functioned very well, and outlived its founder by many years.



He risked his own life a hundred times over.



CHAPTER NINE

PAPA PETER

IN spite of Eudoxia's lack of sympathy on the night of the fire, relations between her and Peter improved somewhat with the birth of little Alexis. He was a fine healthy boy, filling his father's heart with pride. For some time after his birth Peter made awkward attempts to please Eudoxia, meekly following her to church.

Unfortunately, motherhood had not softened her sour bigotry. She refused to receive the women relatives of his foreign friends, contending that the "immodesty" of their clothing affronted her. The foreign ladies wore stays. Russian ladies did not, and never had. And since it was well known that Russian ladies dressed modestly, those who followed other fashions were immodest. This was perfectly clear to Eudoxia and Father Ignatyev, if not to Peter.

Peter, never a patient husband, endured a great deal from Eudoxia for the child's sake. When, in

the August of 1692, he found time to return to Lake Pleshcheyev, he missed his baby son so much that he persuaded Eudoxia to join him there. He had a whole corps of Dutch carpenters with him this time, so he erected a charming little Swiss cottage on the shore of the lake. Lefort designed it after his boyhood home.

The family spent two summers there. Peter helped in the building of a fleet of small boats, with the baby Alexis toddling after him. His father had a miniature set of tools made for him, and tried with infinite patience to teach the child to use them. Since Alexis was only three on his second and last visit, it is unlikely that he acquired much skill. But Peter boasted that he discerned a "monstrous fine talent" for shipbuilding in his son.

Little Alexis took complete possession of his father's heart. This great strong Russia he meant to build—it must be double great, double strong now, for it was to be his son's Russia.

Peter, who had light-heartedly slighted his own studies, laboriously drew up a plan for the education of Alexis. All that the enlightened ruler of an enlightened state must know should be taught him. Languages, science, literature, mathematics—Peter knew so little of any of them, but Alexis must know so much!

Hammering busily beside the calm blue lake, with the baby tumbling on the grass beside him, Peter dreamed great dreams. God had given this fair realm of Russia to the Romanovs, and the Romanovs had been all unworthy of the gift. Ignorant and self-centered, they had passed their days in luxurious

idleness, concerned with nothing but the pampering of their own bodies and the saving of their own souls. Outside the world moved on; other nations passed from greatness to greatness, but Russia slept behind her wall.

It was going to be different now. For Peter the task of clearing away the ancient rubbish, old customs, old superstitions, old chains. For Peter the laying of firm foundations, the building of the house.

A house for his son. Clean and swept and garnished, like the Dutch homes in the foreign quarter, with the fresh air of progress swirling through its chambers. Such would be the Russia he would hand over to Alexis when the time came. The cost, he knew, would be tremendous. Whatever the cost, he thought with a fond glance at the laughing child, he would pay it, and count himself blessed.

Boatbuilding at Pleshcheyev had seemed the finest thing on earth to Peter once. Now, in his second summer there, he began to see it for what it was, a mere hobby.

He grew restless and moody. There was so much to be done, and so little time! Early in July he decided to leave the lake and go to Archangel. There were foreign vessels there, real ocean-going ships. Such ships Russia must have, if she were to take her place among nations. The small boats he had launched so happily on Lake Pleshcheyev, in which he had sailed and thought himself a very fine mariner, were nothing but toys. It was time for the real thing now.

He hurried the family back to Moscow and began to plan the journey. He would have taken the baby

Alexis with him, but his own mother backed up Eudoxia's firm refusal.

Part of the trip would be made by barge down the River Dvina; Natalia grew hysterical at the very thought of exposing her grandson to such danger. She was nervous enough as it was, convinced that Peter was recklessly exposing himself to certain death. She demanded that Peter promise her to *look* at the foreign ships only, not to set foot upon them. Knowing in his soul that he would never keep such a promise, he refused to make it. He departed with her reproaches ringing in his ears.

He arrived at Archangel just in time for the great fair held every year in honour of the Assumption of the Virgin. The streets were in gala dress, the harbour crowded with ships of all nations. They had come to trade, bringing English; Dutch, and German goods to exchange for hemp, grain, tar, and leather.

It was all new to Peter, exciting and delightful. Archangel, too, had its foreign quarter, and there he made his home. He mingled with the strange merchants and seamen, asking a thousand questions, observing and learning all he could.

As his mother had feared, he lost no opportunity to visit the ships. And when he found a Dutch master who had a small vessel for sale, he promptly bought it. He engaged a crew from the ships in port, and set out for a cruise along the Lapland coast.

This was the first time that, as a Dutch writer puts it, "the Frozen Ocean (Arctic) had the honour of bearing a monarch on its bosom." When stormy weather was encountered he cheered his crew by

remarking, "Don't be afraid, the Tsar Peter can't be drowned. Tell me now, did you ever hear of a Russian tsar being drowned?" They were obliged to confess they never had, which was not strange. No tsar before Peter had ever left the safety of dry land.

Among the ships at Archangel was a Dutch man-of-war. This was the first naval vessel Peter had ever seen. He made friends with the skipper, who took him on a week's cruise. He went, not as a passenger, but as a member of the crew.

The first day he served as a "zwabber," the lowest rank in the Dutch navy. His duties were to swab the decks and clean the cabin. He worked his way up to cabin boy, then to apprentice sailor, and finally to able seaman, all in the space of a week. On the last day out he demanded target practice, offering to pay for the ammunition used. He personally manned the gun that knocked a sizable chunk off a floating iceberg.

He spent four months at Archangel. Before he left he gave orders for two merchant vessels to be built in the shipyards there. Russia, too, was to have a merchant marine; her grain and hemp were to be carried, not in foreign freighters, but under her own flag.

Back in Moscow, Peter found his family in a sad state. Natalia was ill; Eudoxia had shut herself up in a convent.

In the three years since the birth of Alexis there had been two other babies. One had lived only a few months; the other only a few hours. Peter, deeply grieved himself, had done his best to comfort

Eudoxia, but she grimly proclaimed the misfortune a judgment upon him. She began a practice of "retreats" in a favourite convent, spending weeks at a time there, in prayer and penance for her husband's sins.

The fact that it was a week before Eudoxia came home to welcome him back to Moscow did not distress Peter unduly. He was disappointed because she had taken little Alexis with her. But his anxiety over his mother's health blotted out everything else.

Natalia died on January 25, 1694, a few weeks after his return. Peter spent most of his time at her bedside, but on the day of her death he had left her to review his troops. When word was brought to him she was dying he hurried to her, wearing the shortened coat and knee breeches of the new army uniform.

The Patriarch Joachim had been summoned to the dying woman. He met Peter on the threshold of her room and forbade him to enter. It was sacrilege, he proclaimed, to approach a deathbed in those outrageous foreign clothes.

"I should think, Father," Peter answered him, "that you would have something better to do in this hour than to meddle with the business of tailors. Stand back and let me pass."

Eudoxia had not been particularly fond of her mother-in-law. But professing to see in his mother's death a fresh sign of God's displeasure with Peter, she instituted a fanatically strict period of mourning. Peter's rebuke of the Patriarch was his crowning sin, outweighing all others. Eudoxia's ladies-in-waiting were commanded to pray for him by

name, begging that he might be forgiven the offence of blasphemy.

Peter could scarcely enter a room of his palace without stumbling over a kneeling lady, beseeching heaven in his behalf. Baby Alexis knelt by his mother's side, "praying for Papa."

One can hardly blame Peter for growing impatient. He was suffering cruel distress over Natalia's death, blaming himself bitterly for not having heeded her pleas to return sooner. A little genuine sympathy mingled with Eudoxia's reproaches might have won him over, but her harsh fanaticism only alienated him the more. When she announced that she meant to spend the forty days of Lent in the convent he felt nothing but relief.

She departed, again taking Alexis with her. Peter would have done better to demand that the child remain behind. But Alexis was only a baby of three; to attempt to separate him from his mother would have meant more reproaches, more prayers. Peter was thankful enough to see her go.





CHAPTER TEN

PETER'S FIRST WAR

GOLITZYN's Crimean campaign had left its after effects. Sophia's pretence of victory had not fooled anyone for long; the Russians knew now that they had been defeated. They were a proud people, and they did not like the idea.

Neither did Russia's ally Poland like it. When Peter returned from Archangel he found a Polish mission waiting to urge him to renew the struggle.

Peter was not greatly impressed by their arguments, but there was another consideration. The Tartars had already taken the initiative, raiding Ukrainian border towns, carrying off cattle, killing and looting in true Wild West fashion. Peter's Ukrainian subjects were begging him to come to their rescue.

It was this appeal, rather than the Polish pressure, which influenced the tsar. He had sworn to protect

his people. The Ukrainians should not call on him in vain.

Probably there was another incentive. He had this fine new army, the finest in the world, he felt sure. But it had not yet been tested in battle. Here was a wonderful chance to prove its worth.

For one reason or another, the decision was taken. Early in January, 1695, Russia marched.

Peter divided his army into two parts. One section went by barge down the Dnieper River. The other, composed of Peter's own two regiments and the best of the streltzy, had as their goal the Turkish port of Azov, barring Russian access to the Black Sea.

This second army was under the command of Gordon, Lefort, and a Russian general named Golovin. Their decisions were subject to the approval of "Bombardier Sergeant Peter Alexeyev of the Preobrazhenski regiment."

The 1695 campaign against the Tartars failed as dismally as had Golitzyn's. Starvation and sickness, cold and wild beasts took a greater toll than the enemy. The Russian soldiers did not lack courage, but they lacked everything else a soldier needs. So simple and important a ration as salt had been left behind; cannons had been brought with no balls to fit them, powder was allowed to dampen and arms to rust. The river barges by which part of the journey was made were mishandled, colliding with each other and with the shores.

Peter's division reached Azov on his name day, June 29. They besieged the town for fourteen weeks,

trying several assaults that failed. On September 27 they gave it up and began the long disastrous retreat.

The Dnieper section, with slightly better luck, had taken two Crimean block-houses, but had suffered even greater losses. The campaign as a whole was as ineffectual as Golitzyn's, with far less excuse.

Only one comment of Peter's has come down to us. "I have learned something," he told Gordon.

What he had learned was the tremendous importance of transport and supply. Gordon, a "death-or-glory" soldier, disdained to concern himself with such matters. No one had told Peter, drilling his splendid army in Moscow, that success would depend upon such prosaic things as food and fodder. He learned that lesson for himself, and he never forgot it.

He lost no time in planning a second campaign. The town of Azov is on the Don River, about ten miles from the point where the river empties into the Sea of Azov leading to the great Black Sea. The Russians had floated down the Don by barge, disembarking a few miles above the town to attempt a land assault. The Turks had been able to reinforce Azov by sea.

This time Peter was determined to close the water-gate to Azov. To do it he would give his country what she had never had nor dreamed of having. Russia was about to acquire a navy.

Except for the shipyards at Archangel, the chief business of which was the repair of foreign ships

buffeted by Arctic seas, Russia had only one place that could be called a shipbuilding centre. This was Voronezh, a good-sized town on the Don, three hundred miles south of Moscow.

The "ships" turned out at Voronezh were flat-bottomed scows even more crude than those used by Peter's troops. Peter's transport barges could be rowed upstream, although usually they were towed by men on shore. The Voronezh craft depended on the current to move them.

They were built for only one purpose, to carry grain and wine to the Cossacks on the lower Don. This was the salary paid by the tsars to the wild southern tribesmen, in return for which they were expected to protect the border from the Tartars. The Cossacks had no use for boats, and no method of returning the barges anyway, so they broke them up for firewood after unloading them.

The shipbuilders at Voronezh were not highly skilled, but at least they were accustomed to working with timber. Peter collected all the shipwrights in the country, and sent to Holland and Venice for more. There on the banks of the Don he began building the first Russian navy.

Thirty thousand men laboured at Voronezh through the mild winter of 1695-96. Peter laboured at their side, directing, encouraging, and doing a prodigious share with his own hands.

They built thirteen hundred barges, and thirty galleys propelled by oars. Three of the lighter galleys, including the flagship, the *Principium*, were fitted with masts for sail.

Four thousand men, selected from various

regiments, were told off into a marine battalion. Lefort was made admiral. A Russian general named Shein commanded the land forces. This time "Peter Alexeyev" did not undertake to advise them. The tsar was still only a sergeant in the army, but he was captain of the *Principium*.

Late in January he was called back to Moscow by the death of his brother Ivan. Peter had been deeply attached to the gentle, harmless imbecile who shared his throne. Ivan left three small daughters, all under four years old, and a young widow of twenty-seven. Peter made generous provision for them, commending them to the kindly care of an older sister, Natalia.

He was delayed in Moscow for nearly a month, partly because of a neglected foot injury. He employed his time in bed by drawing up careful plans for an adequate commissary.

He returned to Voronezh with the first contingent of marines, escorting a huge shipment of army stores. Ammunition was packed with the guns it fitted; food requirements had been worked out and provided for; there were boots and great-coats for every man.

The last of the mobilised army reached Voronezh late in April. On May 1, 1696, General Shein raised on his galley the great flag bearing the royal arms, the oarsmen fell to, and the second Azov expedition was under way.

They reached the mouth of the Don on June 16. The Cossacks had already done good work there by attacking a Turkish convoy and driving it out to sea. These horsemen aided the troops to land and

joined forces with them. The barges were lashed together and moored from bank to bank, bristling with cannon. Azov, lying a few miles up-river, was completely cut off from outside help.

The second siege began on June 29, exactly a year after the first unsuccessful one. It ended on July 27, when the Turkish commander ran up the white flag. The defeated garrison was granted all the honours of war. Fully armed and with battle flags flying, the Turks marched through the Russian lines, generously cheered by their conquerors. They were allowed to pass the blockade to Turkish ships waiting to take them off.

The Turks had taken their families, leaving Azov empty except for Russian prisoners captured in the first campaign. The town had been badly damaged by cannonading, so the first job was to make it habitable. While the army was busy with this, Peter sailed the *Principium* out into the Azov Sea.

He was in search of a harbour for his fleet, Azov itself being unsuitable. He found it in the shelter of a cape known to the Cossacks as Taganrog, or the Tagan Horn. Engineers were brought to construct a fortress here, and to build harbour installations. A new town quickly grew up around them.

Back in Azov, wreckage had been cleared up and new strong fortifications were under construction. Turkish mosques were turned into Christian churches, so that before Peter left Azov he was able to hear Mass in one of them. He helped the improvised service considerably by singing bass in the choir.



Fully armed, the Turks marched through the Russian lines.

Moscow went wild with joy when the good news reached there. The citizens immediately began planning a mighty reception to their triumphant army. Peter, however, was in no hurry to go home. He sailed his galley up the Don by easy stages, enjoying the rest after mighty exertions, but keeping his eyes and ears open, too.

Mazeppa, hetman of the Cossacks, entertained him for a night in one of the river villages. He gave Peter a magnificent sabre, its scabbard encrusted with precious stones, "every one of them stolen from the Turks," the hetman boasted.

The Cossacks were not a race. They began as a gang of outlaws, serfs from the great estates who found refuge in the sparsely settled south. Their number was swelled by runaways of every sort, including military deserters. They raided lonely villages for wives, or carried off Tartar maidens. They lived somewhat as American early Indians did, hunting and fishing, moving on with the seasons. Their origin goes back to the fifteenth century. In Peter's time there were six or seven bands, taking their names from the rivers near which they dwelt. The Cossacks of the Don, whose chief was the hetman Mazeppa, were the strongest tribe.

Mazeppa was a Ukrainian of good family. In his youth he had been involved in a scandal which drove him to join the Cossacks. He wielded a great deal of power, and he assured Peter of his unswerving loyalty.

Another stop was made at Tula, where the Don dwindled to a stream too small for navigation.

Horses were waiting here to carry Peter to Moscow, but he lingered to inspect the ironworks of Tula.

One Demidov, known as the cleverest iron forger in the region, taught Peter his art. The tsar was so delighted with it that he lingered for several weeks, turning out iron bars with his own hands. Before he went on to Moscow he had added one more to the list of skilled trades in which to-day he could qualify for union membership. There were eventually seventeen of them.

On October 10, 1696, Moscow welcomed her heroes. It had been a long time since the capital city had had a genuine victory to celebrate; she was in a mood to make the most of it.

Triumphal arches had been erected, spanning the line of march from the city gate to the Kremlin. They were twined with evergreen and surmounted by symbolic paintings. In the Red Square before the Kremlin, bonfires had been kindled to roast whole oxen; near by a fountain spouted red wine.

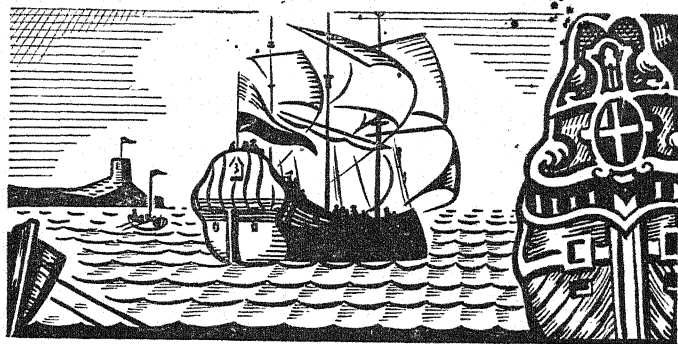
Church bells clanged, cannon fired thunderous salutes, fireworks flared as the cavalcade moved through the crowded streets. Shein, Gordon, and Lefort had each a gilded carriage for himself, drawn by rose-wreathed horses. The boyar officers were mounted; the old nobles, their fathers and uncles, rode beside them with their armed retainers.

Every male citizen of any consequence was in the procession, everyone of lower degree, male and female, crowded the pavements. Only the ladies of gentle birth were barred from active participation. Peeping from behind curtained windows, they

watched breathlessly for a glimpse of their triumphant young tsar.

Carriage after carriage rolled by, but Peter was not within. No spirited charger bore his heavy frame. It was not until the tail of the procession wound into the square that he came into view. There, dressed in rough seaman's clothes, towering head and shoulders above them, Captain Peter Alexeyev of the *Principium* marched sturdily at the head of his ship's company.





CHAPTER ELEVEN

JOURNEY TO THE WEST

PETER had set his foot firmly upon the Azov Sea, which leads into the Black. He strengthened his position there by sending three thousand peasant families to people the empty town, with three thousand streltzy soldiers to garrison it.

Voronezh now became a shipbuilding centre of real consequence. The tsar commanded that every noble controlling ten thousand serf labourers should build one ship; every monastery of eight thousand souls should do the same.

The labourers could be farm workers, monks, or monks' servants; it was all one to Peter. Overseers were coming from Holland and Venice. Men who had never built ships before would build them now, The government would furnish timber from the forests around Voronezh, but the boyars must provide metal-work, cordage, and armament at their own expense. He gave them a year and a half, until April, 1698, to produce a finished fleet.

With this work under way, Peter felt free to carry out a plan that he had long cherished in secret. On a night in February, 1697, the tsar gave a great banquet in his Kremlin palace.

All his comrades of the Azov campaign were there, and all his closest friends from the foreign suburb. They imagined this was only another gathering of "the company," as Peter loved to call his circle of intimates. It was not until the long, heavy meal had reached the dessert stage of salted cucumbers and caviar that Peter got to his feet.

"My friends," he began, "I have called you here for a purpose. You all know that I've urged the boyars to send their sons abroad to learn how the modern world lives. It's no secret that the results have been disappointing. Only thirty young men have gone, and their fathers make my life miserable with their grumbling. The boys are supposed to write me on their progress, but if they are learning anything beyond Venetian dances and a taste for Dutch brandy their letters don't show it. I'm disgusted with them."

"You ought to go yourself, Peter," his young cousin Simeon Naryshkin observed. "You're the man to learn all that needs to be learned."

He meant it as a joke, but to his surprise Peter nodded vigorously.

"Exactly what I've been thinking, Cousin. I, and you, and the rest of us. What do you say, friends? Does the idea please you?"

They stared at him, speechless. "I mean it," he went on earnestly. "You know how hard I've worked to learn shipbuilding. I hope you won't

think I'm boasting when I say I've learned all there is to learn here. I am not content. I want to learn more. I want to learn it in the great shipbuilding centres of Holland and England—especially I want to learn it at Zaandam, where my old master Brant came from. I'm going to Zaandam and apprentice myself to one of the big shipyards. I hope some of you will come with me."

He sat down and picked up his cup of vodka, tossing it off in one thirsty gulp. Speechmaking was not one of the arts Peter had mastered.

There was silence for a moment. Then the young Naryshkin cousin spoke.

"I don't think you can do that, Peter. It would take months, maybe years, to learn shipbuilding that way. What would the government do without you?"

"It will do very well. Your father, my Uncle Leo, knows more about civil government than I'll ever learn. I'll leave him in charge, with a few boyars to help him out. They'll manage."

Francis Lefort spoke for the first time. "You're really serious, Peter? Then you can count on me. I can think of nothing pleasanter than seeing Europe again in your company."

"Thank you, Fransko. I knew I could count on you. Simeon, will you come? Splendid. Well, comrades, what other volunteers have we?"

There were volunteers in plenty, but it developed that Peter had his own ideas about the party. Regretfully he announced that only Lefort among the foreigners should go. This was to be an educational trip for Russians, he insisted. To his foreign friends

he solemnly delegated the task of "keeping civilisation's torch alight" in Moscow. Nearly all the young Russians present agreed to join him.

"And now we come to the best part of the plan," he went on. "You know, friends, if I travel as Tsar of all the Russias I'll have to waste a lot of time being civil to the highly born. We don't want that. So I shall go in—in—what's the word, Fransko? When the French king wants to get out in the carnival crowds?"

"Incognito."

"That's it. I shall go incognito. Master Peter Alexeyev, just as I used to be at the lake with Brant. That's the only way I'll have time to myself."

"But, Peter, it will be very difficult," Lefort protested. "Do you mean that we're to disguise ourselves as working men?"

"No, no, only me. You, my beloved Fransko, shall travel in all the magnificence your heart could desire. Listen, this is my plan.

"We'll announce to the world that the Tsar Peter is sending an embassy to the chief courts of Europe. To pay his respects, to negotiate treaties, any excuse we like. It will be a very princely embassy, and you, Fransko, shall head it. I'll be humble Master Peter, following in your train. No one will notice me. They'll never know when you leave me behind in the first well-found shipyard."

It seemed a crazy scheme, but essentially it was sound. It left Peter free to devote himself to study, the true purpose of the journey.

Uncle Leo Naryshkin approved it. He advised, how-

ever, that the official embassy be strengthened by the addition of the governor of Siberia and the governor of Balkhov, both experienced diplomatists who had travelled abroad before. Uncle Leo believed that some trade treaties might well be negotiated which would make the trip pay for itself.

On March 20, 1697, the embassy set out, travelling by carriage to Riga in the Swedish province of Livonia. In the suite of the three ambassadors were twenty nobles and thirty-five "volunteers," young men travelling as students. Peter was among the thirty-five.

His comrades of the banquet table were given free choice. A few of them, including Simeon Naryshkin and Danilovich Menshikov, joined the "volunteer" company. The majority preferred the easier life of the ambassadorial suite.

The cavalcade, including priests, interpreters, dwarfs, servants, and soldiers, numbered two hundred and fifty persons. It was forbidden to anyone to address Peter as "Your Majesty," or to mention that their tsar was with them.

Planning a journey of strict incognito was easier than maintaining it. Peter's enormous size was hard to hide. Then in some of the countries they visited he wished to question persons of high rank who could scarcely have been expected to satisfy the curiosity of a nobody. So there were times when he found it convenient to step out of his rôle and become the visiting monarch. But on the whole his purpose was accomplished. Of the year and a half he spent abroad, nine months at least were devoted to hard manual labour in Dutch and English shipyards.

He found Zaandam disappointing; chiefly because the people of the little town recognised him and followed him around. He had better luck at Amsterdam, where he worked for five months upon a large merchant vessel. When it was finished the burgomaster presented it to him in the name of the city.

Having satisfied himself that he had learned all the Dutch could teach him of ship carpentry, Peter made a tour of Holland's industrial centres. He went to Texel, where the Greenland whaling boats put in, and worked for a week rendering whale oil from blubber. He inspected the famous Dutch windmills, ground corn by wind power, and served for a day in a paper factory. Whatever establishment he visited, instead of being shown through by officials, he always enrolled himself as a workman and tried his own hand at it.

With practically no expenditure of time or trouble he became a dentist.

In the Europe of that day, if you had a tooth-ache you took it to the market place, where a travelling dentist was almost sure to be holding forth. This scientist attracted a crowd by ballyhoo methods, sometimes engaging in song and dance himself, sometimes carrying a troupe of entertainers. When a large enough audience had gathered, those with troublesome teeth were invited to step up and have them drawn.

This was the headline act of the production. The dentist kept up a running fire of humorous comment as he worked, but the truly side-splitting comedy was provided by the howls and grimaces of the

victim. Extraction was free. The audience cheerfully contributed when the hat was passed around, having their money's worth in entertainment. The sufferer might even have a few pennies for himself, if he had given an especially fine performance.

Peter, passing through a Dutch market place one day, stopped to watch. And as invariably happened when he saw another man exercising any sort of skill, he wanted to try it.

He demanded the dentist's forceps, and with his great strength easily performed his first extraction. That he happened to get the wrong tooth the first time was sheer bad luck that might have happened to anybody. He did better on the second try, and perfectly on the third. The dentist pronounced him a fully qualified practitioner.

Peter did not allow the talent to rust. It was his boast in after years that there was never a toothache in the Russian army. It appears from some accounts that there were not too many teeth in it, either.

William of Orange, a Dutchman, was king of England. He urged Peter to visit him, sending a naval escort of two men-of-war. Peter left the cumbersome embassy behind him and embarked with only a few friends. He spent about four months in England, a good part of it at the royal arsenal at Woolwich, where he worked at manufacturing explosives.

He shocked the stiff Dutch king by appearing at court in work clothes, but in the end William seems to have grown fond of him. The English courtiers

did not. His manners and his way of living were not what they expected of royalty. They were as cool to him as they dared be, which made him very happy, because he was invited to fewer dull entertainments and could spend more of his leisure in low public houses, drinking with common workingmen and finding out all about their jobs. Peter enjoyed his English visit. He took home a refreshing collection of new ideas to startle his own upper classes.

It was in a London tavern that he learned to smoke a pipe. Some of his foreign friends in Moscow smoked, but this was a practice so frowned upon by the Russian church that even Peter had not adopted it.

Now, having decided that he liked smoking, he determined to pass the pleasure on to his people. Before he left England he concluded an agreement whereby Russia was to import three thousand barrels of tobacco every year. It was asking for trouble with the Patriarch, and he must have known it. But Peter was never one to dodge trouble.

When the details of the English visit were reported to the head of the Russian church, as in due time they were, there were other escapades even more scandalous in his eyes than the use of tobacco.

Peter had an insatiable curiosity concerning all forms of religion. In London he attended services not only of the Church of England, but of Baptists and Quakers. The Quakers particularly interested him. At his request William Penn, who spoke Dutch fluently, visited him and discussed the tenets of his creed.

Such action by a lesser person in Russia would have been a crime punishable by death. Even in the tsar it was a proceeding certain to bring down the wrath of the church upon his head. It was one more item in the long bill which the Russian conservative element was charging up against him.

Peter returned to Holland late in April. He visited Dresden and Vienna, and was planning to go on to Venice when news from Moscow changed all his plans. He arranged to go home by the shortest possible route, cutting across Poland.

Poland had a new king, a German prince recently elected to the throne. Augustus the Second had expected a visit from the tsar. Learning that Peter was travelling in such haste that he would not have time to go to Warsaw, Augustus came out to the village of Rava to meet him.

The Polish king was of Peter's own heroic size; he was the first sovereign Peter had met that he could not look down upon. The two giants struck up a violent friendship. They exchanged clothing and arms as a pledge of brotherhood, Peter giving Augustus a particularly fine sword which had belonged to his father.

It is supposed that it was the influence of Augustus in those three days at Rava that decided Peter to make peace with Turkey and turn his military strength against Sweden. Augustus had good reason to fear his northern neighbour; to win Peter as an ally against her was a great triumph for Polish diplomacy.



CHAPTER TWELVE

THE STRELTZY AGAIN

THE news that had interrupted Peter's journey was a month old when the messenger reached him.

The streltzy had revolted, declaring that Peter had deserted his country, that he had become a worshipper of false gods in foreign lands, that he had sold his soul to the devil and was no longer fit to govern. They no longer recognised him as their tsar, but were transferring their allegiance to their "rightful ruler," the Tsarevna Sophia.

Prince Ramodanovsky, governor of Moscow, had written the letter. He added that he had dispatched Generals Gordon and Shein to deal with the rebels, and felt sure that the bulk of the army would remain loyal. But he did not attempt to conceal the fact that there was great apprehension in Moscow.

In the interval since the messenger left the capital anything could have happened. Peter pushed his cavalcade ahead with feverish energy, but haste on

those wretched roads was impossible. It was a weary, anxious journey that ended in Moscow on August 25, 1698.

He found that General Gordon, after making every possible effort to reason with the mutinous streltzy, had taken up arms against them and stopped their march on Moscow. About two hundred had been killed, many had fled, but two thousand had been taken prisoner. These two thousand were in jail, awaiting Peter's pleasure when he returned.

Upon his order these prisoners were "questioned," which means that they were beaten with the knout, and in some cases tortured by having flame applied to their bare backs.

This was the "third degree" of Russian police practice, considered the only practical way to wring the truth from hardened offenders. It did not originate with Peter, nor indeed with Russia. England and France and all other European countries of the time practised some variation of it. It is whispered that vestiges of it linger in some city police stations of our own day.

Under questioning, the streltzy incriminated Peter's half-sister Sophia. They declared that two letters from her had been read aloud in their camp, proclaiming herself their true sovereign and urging them to recover the throne for her. These letters were never produced. It is not certain that they were ever written.

Sophia, summoned from her convent, protested her innocence. No torture was applied to the tsar's sister. Peter questioned her himself, sternly but with every consideration for her comfort. She

denied all knowledge of the plot, defying him to prove that she had any hand in it.

Most historians believe that Sophia was guilty. Even if it were true that she did not instigate the revolt, no one doubts that she would gladly have profited by it. But since proof was lacking, Peter would not condemn her. For her only punishment she was sent back to the convent, this time to become a nun instead of a lady lodger.

In the end five hundred soldiers established their innocence and were released. Fifteen hundred were executed.

This bloody period marked the end of the streltzy as an organised body. In the Turkish campaigns they had shown themselves unsatisfactory soldiers, sullen and resentful to foreign officers, unwilling to adopt new weapons and methods. The corps was broken up and dispersed through the remote provinces. The men were forbidden to enlist in the Russian army. Their battle flag was torn from the cathedral wall and cast into the Moskva.

It cannot be denied that Peter acted with extreme severity in this affair. One of his qualities, sometimes a virtue and sometimes a defect, was that everything he did, he did "all out." Compromise and half measures were simply unthinkable to him. Having convinced himself that the streltzy were a menace to public peace, he saw no other course but to stamp them out, root and branch.

Peter had good reason to believe that some of the boyars and certain priests had backed the streltzy uprising. But evidence was lacking; there was no

way of connecting any highly placed courtiers with the plot. The ferocious punishment of the streltzy was intended also to serve as an object lesson, warning future conspirators of what they might expect.

The Kremlin court was a fertile soil for plots and counterplots, large and small. Peter, impatient and forthright, dealt with a dozen of them in the weeks after his return home.

A certain merchant desired to obtain iron concessions in the Urals. He came to Peter with the story that the family already working those mines had declared that Peter himself was dead and buried in Holland; that the person now bearing his name was a Pole scheming to annex Russia to his country. Other Moscow bigwigs came with different versions of this tale, all designed to discredit the persons who, they claimed, were circulating them.

As a matter of fact, such stories were widely told and believed by many who denied them. The idea of impostors has always had a curious hold on Russian imaginations. At least two tsars are conceded to have been impostors, although recognised in their time as the true royal rulers.

The most famous example is False Dimitri the First. The real Dimitri, son of Ivan the Terrible, is supposed to have been murdered by Boris Godunov, but an unknown adventurer claimed and obtained the throne under that title after the death of Boris. It did not seem inconceivable to the Russians that, if Peter had really died abroad, there were factions at home or in other countries who would profit by concealing the death and substituting their own puppet.

Peter was more amused than otherwise by these tales. He knew quite well that he was Peter; if anyone wanted to challenge the fact, he was ready for him. He was not impressed by the loyalty of the gentlemen who brought the rumours to him, and they did not receive the rewards they had hoped for.

After the free life abroad, he found the Kremlin atmosphere, heavy with intrigue and gossip, intolerably oppressive. With characteristic energy he set about clearing it. He tackled the most unpleasant task first.





CHAPTER THIRTEEN

EUDOXIA

WHEN Peter returned from the Turkish war, his wife had not been on hand to welcome him. Eudoxia was inside the Kremlin walls, but she was secluded in her favourite convent, engaged in a cycle of prayer. The same thing had happened when he came home from Archangel.

More than once, in the quarrels that raged between them, he had told her that she was more nun than tsaritsa, and might as well go to her convent and stay there. He had made the remark in anger, but the idea was growing in his mind.

There had been a furious scene just before he left for Holland, with Eudoxia denouncing the trip as a blasphemous defiance of God's will. She had added that she would spend her days in prayers for him. Whereupon Peter had told her that he hoped she would decide to become a nun. He thought it would make them both happier.

She did not believe he was in earnest, although he wrote from abroad to her, to her confessor Ignatyev and to the Patriarch, recommending that she take the veil.

She was in the Kremlin palace when Peter came home from his journey, but this time she was given no opportunity to welcome him. He spent a night at Gordon's house and then went to his Preobrazhensk estate, making that his headquarters while he directed the liquidation of the streltzy corps.

He had brought a collection of foreign toys for little Alexis, now nearly nine years old. These gifts were delivered at the palace. Peter had been home for three days before he found time to visit his son. He snatched an hour early in the morning, striding into the boy's bedroom.

* The youngster, suddenly awakened, saw an enormous giant of a man dressed in the red shirt, tight trousers and moleskin cap of a Dutch ship carpenter. Peter had adopted this costume at Zaandam, declaring it the most sensible clothing he had ever seen. He wore it by choice on most occasions, suitable or unsuitable.

The child had not seen his father for a year and a half. He can hardly be blamed for not recognising him in these strange new clothes, nor for howling in terror when Peter snatched him from his warm bed and crushed him in a bearlike hug.

"Here, here, little man, less of that! Is this a way to greet your papa? Give us a kiss and say you're glad to see me!"

The loud bass voice only added to the boy's terror. He struggled and shrieked, beating with puny

strength against the broad chest to which he was crushed.

"Come now," Peter roared. "Papa's here to play with you. Where's the castle I bought in Leipzig? How about the French dolls? And the Swiss music box and the Dutch hobby-horse?"

His glance swept the room. There was no sign of the new toys.

"Well, we'll play as we used to at the lake, then. Remember when I used to do this to you?" Without further warning he tossed the boy high into the air, catching him neatly in his great gentle hands.

It was a game that had made the baby Alexis shriek with delight in those long-ago summer days at Pleshcheyev. Now it sent the boy into violent hysterics. He screamed insanely, while Peter, vainly hoping that the rough play would yet please him, tossed him and caught him again and again.

The maid-servant whom Peter had brushed aside at the door had not recognised him, either. Now, sobbing in terror as great as the boy's, she ran through the palace, screaming that the devil had seized the young tsarevich. She battered upon Father Ignatyev's door, and Eudoxia's confessor came bravely forth, prepared to do battle with the Father of Evil.

Alexis crouched on his bed, sobbing exhaustedly. With frigid deference Father Ignatyev addressed his sovereign.

"It would have been better, Your Majesty, to give us notice of your coming. We could then have prepared the child."

"Prepared? And what sort of preparation does a son need to meet his father? What have you done to him, that he does not know my face?"

"Your face has been long removed from his sight, Sire."

"Is that a crime? Why have I spent my time in far lands, if not for his sake? So that the Russia he will one day rule may be a better, stronger land! Everything I do I do for Russia, and for *him*."

The priest compressed his lips and did not answer. His cold, waiting attitude infuriated the tsar.

"And something else," he said violently. "I sent some toys to him. Where are they?"

"I believe the articles are locked in the tsaritsa's press, Your Majesty."

"They are? And may I ask why? The gifts were to my son, not my wife. Why were they not given to him?"

Father Ignatyev dropped his eyes. "Some of the articles," he said primly, "were immoral."

Peter stared, and then in spite of his anger gave way to laughter. "The French dolls—a present from the mother of the Electress of Brandenburg! Yes, I can see that their flounces and laces might shock you, Father. But surely you found nothing immoral in toy villages, or a hobby-horse?"

"They are frivolous and silly," the priest said firmly. "They could only serve to tempt the tsarevich to waste time upon them that might more properly be spent over his catechism. We thought it best to withhold them."

"We—we! As though I, his own father, were not the best judge of that! Tell me, Father, who is this

‘we’? Have you done this upon your own responsibility, or is there someone else involved?”

“I have acted,” the confessor replied, “upon the orders of Her Majesty, the Tsaritsa Eudoxia. If the action displeases you, I would humbly suggest that you discuss it with your lady wife.”

“I’ll discuss it with her,” Peter promised grimly. “One other thing, Father Ignatyev. I want to know how my son’s education has progressed in my absence. Can you tell me?”

“The tsarevich has made great progress in church doctrine, Sire. Her Majesty deigns to be pleased with my instruction.”

“No doubt. I gave orders that a tutor in mathematics and geography be engaged for him. Was this done?”

“Some such attempt was made, Your Majesty, but it is difficult to secure a teacher in those subjects. And then the health of the tsarevich is very delicate. Her Majesty felt that he should not be forced to undue exertions. But she can tell you better than I. Will you visit her apartments now?”

“I will not.” Peter thought rapidly. “Tell Her Majesty from me that I will see her to-night, at the house of the postmaster Vinius.”

The child had grown quieter in his bed. Peter bent to kiss him, but Alexis shrank back as though from an expected blow. His father straightened. “Good-bye, Alexis,” he said, and clumped angrily from the room.

Eudoxia brought her ladies-in-waiting to the postmaster’s house that night, but Peter bade them wait

in the anteroom. He led her alone into the library and closed the door. The meeting lasted for four hours. The sound of weeping, of pleading, and of prayer came through the stout panels, and Peter's voice reasoning, coaxing, and sometimes roaring furiously. But what words were spoken are known to no man.

Peter opened the door when the night was far gone and led his wife to the waiting women. Eudoxia had pulled her veil over her eyes; she tottered and collapsed in their arms.

"Take her home and put her to bed," the tsar ordered. "She will tell you herself of her future plans."

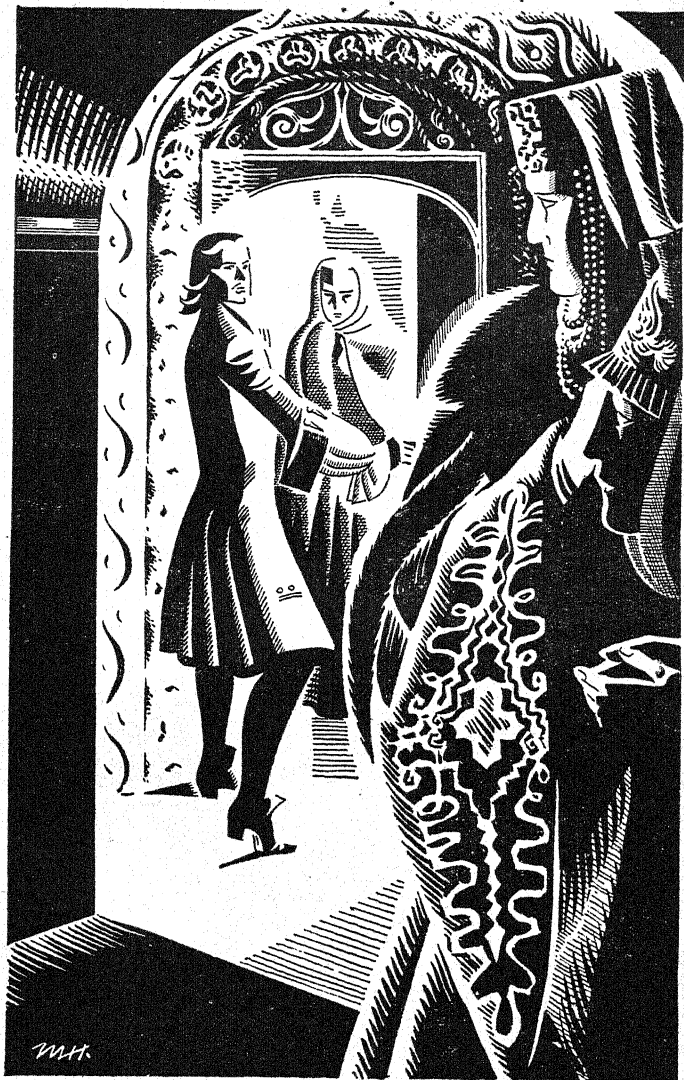
The plans were not Eudoxia's, but Peter's. He had informed her of them, and had held to them inflexibly against her frantic pleading.

The wretched woman was to become a nun. She was to go, not to the Kremlin convent where she had made a second home for herself, but to the big Pokrovski convent at Suzdal, a hundred miles from Moscow.

This place had been selected, Peter admitted frankly, to make it impossible for her to see her son. Alexis was to be confided to the care of his Aunt Natalia, Peter's sister. It was expressly stipulated that he was never to see his mother again.

Peter had many grievances against Eudoxia. There had never been any happiness in their marriage. She hated and feared his foreign friends; she denounced his reforms and prayed in public for his sins. But the breaking point had come over the boy.

Peter made no allowance for his own awkward-



He led her alone into the library.

ness, or for the natural dismay of a timid child suddenly awakened to an unexpected situation. To the father it seemed that Eudoxia had made of his son a feeble, whimpering weakling, too dull to recognise his own father, too cowardly to endure a bit of good-natured play. His mother had seen to his religious education, but had failed to provide him with the more worldly instruction Peter had ordered. Her influence must be removed, once and for all, before the boy was completely ruined.

So he reasoned, and on this reasoning he acted. Eudoxia went to Pokrovski as ordered. At the end of her ten-month probationary period she took the vows as Sister Helen.

Peter could dispose of a woman's life in this arbitrary fashion because he was the tsar, all-powerful. It is a pity that he was not also all-wise.

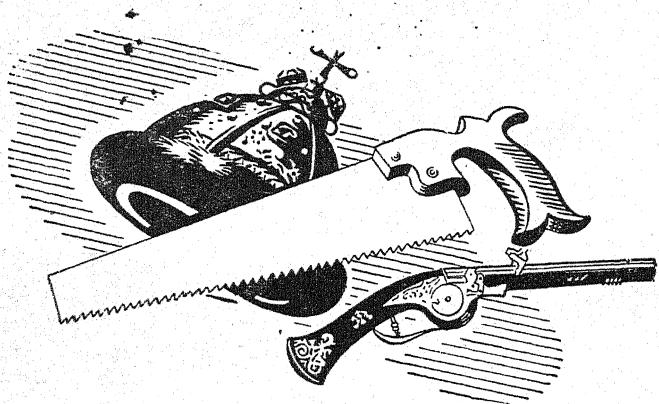
His sister Natalia, to whose care he committed the boy, was a kindly, gentle woman, but only slightly more enlightened than Eudoxia. To Natalia, as to most Russian ladies, religion was of paramount importance, the word of her priest the last word on matters earthly as well as spiritual. Since little Alexis already had a pious bent, his Aunt Natalia would have thought it a mortal sin to interfere with his soul's salvation. It was her urging that Peter grudgingly agreed to keep Father Ignatyev as the boy's religious tutor and confessor. Thus a powerful link between Alexis and his exiled mother remained. It would have been wiser in Peter to break that link.

Natalia lived at Preobrazhensk, with her sister-in-law, Ivan's widow, and Ivan's little girls. To Peter,

who had spent his own boyhood there, it seemed an ideal environment for his son. Once removed from the stuffy Kremlin palace, he thought, Alexis, too, would grow up strong and tough, playing soldiers and building boats.

Having thus simply and happily disposed of his domestic difficulties, Peter undertook a larger job of house-cleaning. He began to attempt to turn Russians from Orientals to Europeans by changing their fashions for them.





CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OF BEARDS AND OTHER THINGS

ON September 1, New Year's Day of the old Russian calendar, General Shein gave a dinner party to celebrate Peter's safe return.

The guests, all men, were army officers, boyars, and influential merchants. The officers wore uniforms designed by Peter after those of the German army. But the others were in the floor-sweeping wool or velvet robes, heavily fur-trimmed, with sleeves extending many inches past the tips of their fingers. All except the youngest officers wore beards. Those of the older men were magnificent, spreading fan-wise across their chests, gleaming with oil and richly scented. A boyar of the old school counted his beard his proudest possession.

The banquet was a lavish one. It offered, not only the choicest of foods and the rarest of wines, but elaborate entertainment for the general's guests. Troupes of singers and dancers succeeded each other;

grotesquely dressed clowns capered about, making merry in the good old tradition.

The festivities were at their height, the wine cup had repeatedly gone round, and the noble guests were very mellow when a new clown appeared. He was in jester's cap and bells, but instead of the conventional fool's rattle he carried an enormous pair of scissors and a razor.

He pranced up to General Shein at the head of the table, seized on his beard, and snipped it off. Then, with comical gestures and grimaces, he proceeded to give the general his first shave. Peter, seated at the general's side, laughed heartily. At the Russian court it was considered healthful to laugh when the tsar laughed, so all the guests joined in the merriment.

The jester, who in private life was Peter's own barber, went the rounds of the table, sparing no one but the clergy. Peter laughed louder and louder. So did the guests. The laughter was loudest when some dignified old boyar, overcome by the wine he had taken, had to be hauled out from under the table for the operation. Many of them slept blissfully through it. There were guests who, awaking next morning with aching heads, looked into their mirrors and started back in horror from their own images, realising for the first time what had been done to them.

They were not amused. Even those who had submitted with a good grace in the general excitement thought it over in the cold grey dawn of the morning after and found themselves indignant. They had had, however, only a foretaste of what was to come.

Going about the city in the weeks that followed, a furclad noble was likely to be stopped by a file of soldiers. The fuming citizen was forced to kneel in the snow, while a soldier armed with shears trimmed off his long gown at the knee. Sleeves were cut, too, so that their heavy folds no longer covered the hand. At every city gate barbers and men with scissors were stationed, so that no one entering the town could escape modernisation.

The younger Russians, particularly the army officers, accepted these changes with good nature and even enthusiasm. Their elders felt differently about it. Of all the reforms that Peter initiated, most of them of far greater importance, none aroused the storm of indignation that the compulsory shaving did. Sermons against it were preached in all churches, the Patriarch himself proclaiming that "it is irreligious, unholy and heretical to shave or cut the beard, an ornament given by God to mark man's superiority to women."

The clergy was always excepted from the order, and in the end Peter was forced to make a concession to the conservative elders. A man might keep his beard, he ruled, but must expect to pay for the privilege. A yearly tax was levied, varying from a penny for a peasant to as much as £50 for the wealthy. On paying his tax the beard-wearer was issued a bronze token to be hung about his neck. So strong was the prejudice in favour of beards that this tax brought in enough revenue to build a warship a year.

It was characteristic of Peter that he began his campaign to turn Russians into Europeans by an

energetic attempt to make them *look* like Europeans. But that was only the beginning.

In Western Europe Peter had been made aware of the existence of a middle class, something almost unknown in his own country. Russia had her very rich and her very poor, with nothing between.

It seemed to Peter that this middle class of small merchants and independent skilled tradesmen formed the backbone of the prosperity and progress he so much admired abroad. In answer to his inquiries they had told him that such a class existed by and through trade, the manufacture and sale of articles needed by the people.

This was another new idea. Russian peasants had great skill in certain handicrafts, notably leather work and the spinning and weaving of linen. But they were not accustomed to producing commercially in any volume. The workers upon a noble's estate made whatever articles their lord required for his own use. In their scanty leisure and with such inferior materials as they could obtain they made what they needed for themselves. What little surplus existed was exported. There was practically no domestic trade in manufactured articles.

Peter decided Russia must have factories, to be set up wherever natural resources justified them. Surveys were made, foreign experts were imported, and Russia entered upon her first industrial era.

There were mistakes, as there were bound to be. The silk factory was an expensive failure. But many of the infant industries, subsidised by the state, took root and flourished. Russian hemp, as good as any in the world, was converted into rope, in great

demand on the farms. Woollen clothing, boots, and iron cooking utensils came upon the home market. Little shops to handle them sprang up in the towns. So splendidly did business flourish that it became necessary to reform the monetary system.

Russia had always had a clumsy currency, but it had not mattered much because no one but the rich had to bother about money. The only coin in circulation was the silver *kopek*. A *ruble* meant a hundred kopeks, but it was a figure in accounting only, not a coin.

Even the man who owned some could not see a ruble, but for generations peasants lived and died without seeing a *kopek*. What they did not produce from the land or make with their own hands they obtained by barter, or by the bounty of their master. Soldiers were supposed to be paid in cash, but usually received instead the wine for which they would have spent it in any case.

Now, with the new prosperity, there was need for a new supply of coins. Peter began by issuing copper kopeks of the same value as the silver ones, but weighing forty-five times as much. These were extremely pleasing to people who had never handled money before, for they weighed down pockets with a wealthy jingle.

Silver and gold coins of larger denominations followed. Within three years the country had a sound system in good working order.

Peter changed not only the money, but the calendar. Up to this time the Russians had followed the Byzantine fashion of reckoning time from the creation of the world—an event fixed with great

exactness as September 1, 5508 B.C. In 1699 Peter decreed that the European practice was to be adopted, dating the years from the birth of Christ; and beginning the year on January 1.

He gave them a postal service, too, and town councils such as he had observed in Holland. He commanded the convents and monasteries, the only seats of learning, to devote a certain time each day to teaching neighbourhood children to read.

Here he encroached upon the domain of the church, already antagonistic. The Patriarch Adrian had taken the lead in denouncing dress reform; he opposed the other new measures with such violence that it probably hastened his death. At any rate, he did die of apoplexy in October, 1700.

This was Peter's opportunity. While the higher clergy wrangled over the choice of a successor, Peter announced that no new patriarch would be chosen for the present. Instead, he appointed two men; one to deal with the strictly religious functions of the patriarchal office; the other to have charge of birth records, marriages, wills and law-suits. All of these necessary human activities were handled through the church, but by putting in charge a man who was not a priest Peter was taking a long step towards curbing the church's power. He was also making for himself a fresh crop of enemies.

All of these changes kept the good people of Moscow in a whirl of confusion. Peter, ever willing to practise what he preached, spared no pains to set them a good example. He had never worn a beard, but now he had himself shaved daily. He discarded Russian dress entirely, receiving foreign diplomats

in his Dutch carpenter's outfit. He celebrated the January New Year's Day with a street carnival staged at his own expense. He went out into the streets himself, mingling freely with the crowds, carrying a bag of apples and sharing them liberally.

Palace etiquette, too, was overhauled. Tradition demanded that anyone approaching the tsar must throw himself upon the ground, in the manner of the "prostrations" of religious observance. Peter abolished this ancient custom, remarking, "Where is the difference between God and the tsar if like honour is shown both? For my part, it will content me if my subjects do less crawling and more work."

Peter returned from Holland in the autumn of 1698. Inauguration of new projects filled all of 1699 and 1700, reckoned the first year of the new century.

Just after the punishment of the streltzy he found time to visit Voronezh, where the naval building he had ordered before his departure was progressing well. He spent some time there working upon a new vessel of his own design. By the spring of 1699 there were eighty-six ships at Voronezh, eighteen of them men-of-war.

The busy year of 1699 was saddened for Peter by the loss of two of his closest friends. Francis Lefort died in February; General Gordon in late November. These men had been dear to him; in their separate ways they had understood him, encouraged him, inspired him. His grief was deep and lasting.

Part of the new squadron at Voronezh was sent



He spent some time at Voronezh.

to escort an envoy to Constantinople, with the object of making a final peace with the Turks. Russia's possession of Azov and Taganrog had been challenged by occasional raids. With the new navy and the stronger army, this might have seemed the time for Russia to renew the war and drive the Moslem from the continent. But Peter, since his interview with Augustus of Poland, had resolved upon another course.

The young tsar's primary purpose was to gain access to the sea. He had made an important beginning in the South by establishing himself upon the Sea of Azov. But the Turks still held the Black Sea, which must be crossed to reach the Mediterranean. To drive them from it he would have to crush their empire, and this was not a simple undertaking. Venice and Austria, his allies of the Azov campaign, had made their own peace with Turkey, and could not be counted upon for anything but secret moral support.

In the North, on the other hand, the Baltic was also an outlet. To secure it Russia would have to fight Sweden, an old enemy against whom the country could easily be roused. The Swedes were established in territory taken from Russia—an old grievance not forgotten by Peter's people.

In the matter of allies, he would have Poland, also an old enemy, but all the more respected for that. Augustus, the Polish king who had met Peter at Rava, had painted a glowing picture of their two countries, fighting side by side, invincible under two rulers who cherished such fond friendship for each other.

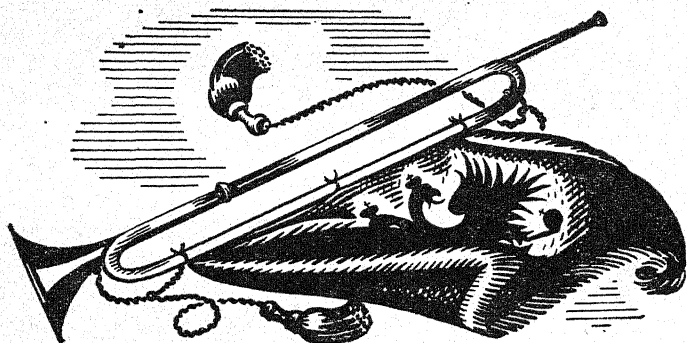
Peter made his choice. He was not finished with the Turks yet. Some day the Black Sea, guarded like the fairest jewel of the Sultan's crown, must open to Russian sail. But that could wait.

His envoy concluded a fairly satisfactory treaty at Constantinople, with Turkey acknowledging Russia's right to the Azov bases. The treaty ended with a declaration of peace between the two countries.

Peter's decks were cleared for action now—his own nautical figure of speech. He had devoted two years to domestic improvements and naval and military preparation. When, on August 8, 1700, he received word that the Turkish treaty had been signed by the Sultan, he wrote to Augustus of Poland before the sun set.

"To-morrow," he said, "I shall declare war upon Sweden and immediately march into Swedish territory."





CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BEGINNING OF THE NORTHERN WAR

SWEDEN at this period was one of the great powers, supreme in northern and central Europe. The conquests of Gustavus Adolphus had given her Finland and the Baltic provinces of Estonia and Livonia (Latvia), once Russian, as well as Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein. Another captive Russian province, Ingria, was a strip along the mainland north and west of Moscow, embracing the southern banks of the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga. Leningrad is now the principal city of that region. The Baltic was thus a Swedish lake, cutting off Russia and Poland from the sea.

Ingria was guarded by some small forts at the mouth of the Neva River, and by a garrison at Narva, just across the Estonian border. Narva was nearest to Moscow, so it was decided that Peter would attack it first, while Augustus of Poland besieged the Livonian city of Riga.

This was the Polish king's idea, or rather that of his political adviser, a Livonian patriot named Patkul. On paper it seemed that Peter's way was the easy task. The Swedes kept only a small garrison at Narva, about sixteen hundred men. Augustus at Riga would have to assault a heavily-fortified city, strongly defended.

Patkul had assured them that both tasks would be easy. Sweden was at war with Denmark. Her soldier-king Charles the Twelfth had his hands full; it would be child's play to snatch Livonia and Ingria while he was involved with the Danes.

Augustus marched to Riga, and Peter marched to Narva. Neither had yet arrived when Charles of Sweden forced the Danes to surrender. Augustus had scarcely settled himself to the siege of Riga when a terrified messenger galloped into the camp with the news that the Swedes, headed by Charles himself, were marching in great force upon the city.

Peter's friend Augustus, who had talked so bravely and planned such magnificent conquests, withdrew his army without waiting for the advancing Swedes. This was probably military prudence rather than cowardice, but the effect was the same. Charles of Sweden thundered on toward Narva, and Russia stood alone to face him.

Peter accompanied his army, not as a sergeant this time, but as a captain, having in his own estimation merited promotion to that rank. It was unfortunate that death had deprived him of Lefort and Gordon, for his new general, the French Duke of Croy, was a drunkard foisted upon him by Augustus.

Croy might have taken Narva before the Swedish king arrived. There was time, and the place was held by a mere handful compared to the thirty-five thousand Peter had mustered.

But the roads were bad; there were difficulties of transport and supply. The Russians, being in hostile territory, had no good sources of information. Their spies came in with word that Charles was moving at a snail's pace, that he had turned back. His Grace of Croy saw no reason to hurry.

Peter, reassured by these reports, turned his thoughts from battle to the always vexing problems of supply. Food and munitions, expected from Novgorod, had not arrived. He decided to go in person and see to them.

He left the camp before Narva on November 18. Just two days later Charles of Sweden arrived with twelve thousand men. He gave battle at once, a surprise attack in a raging blizzard with the wind in the wrong quarter for the Russians. Blinded by snow, swept from their feet by the icy blasts, Croy's men put up a wretchedly poor fight against a foe only a third their size.

It lasted from midday to dusk. A man who was there speaks of the Russian soldiers as "sheep without a shepherd." Fifty foreign officers went over to the enemy. The soldiers of the new levies, green troops who had never known battle, were left without commanders to face seasoned veterans. It is not surprising that they turned and ran. Only Peter's own Preobrazhenski and Semenovski regiments stood their ground, fighting valiantly until the Duke of Croy himself ordered surrender.



Croy's men put up a wretchedly poor fight.

Peter had not reached Novgorod when the news was brought to him. As after his first defeat at Azov, he accepted it philosophically, remarking only, "I know very well that the Swedes will have the advantage of us for a considerable time, but they will teach us at length to beat them." He went on to Novgorod and began strengthening the fortifications there against the likelihood that Charles would continue his victorious march in that direction.

All Europe rang with the praises of the new hero. Charles the Twelfth was only eighteen, remarkably handsome, polished and witty. He had always been fond of dangerous sports, boasting that he had killed a fox when he was seven years old and a bear before he was twelve.

In war he found the grandest sport of all. He was burdened with no high patriotic motives. He did not make war for Sweden's benefit, any more than the ardent big-game hunter seeks meat for his table. He made war because he enjoyed war. And he enjoyed it, no doubt, because he was very, very good at it.

In the European courts bets were laid on the length of the Russian-Swedish War. The estimates varied from six weeks to six months. There was no betting as to the victor, for that seemed certain. The barbaric Russian hordes, ill-trained, undisciplined and ignorant, could never stand up to the efficient fighting machine Charles had inherited and improved. Narva proved that.

Charles seems to have taken the same view. There

was no fun in such easy victory for the young sportsman. So, instead of pressing towards Moscow, he turned back from Narva to Poland, where his cousin Augustus the Second had dared to defy him. He would wait to polish off Russia after he had finished with the Poles. That would be in the coming spring-time, when the Russian weather would be more agreeable.

The courtiers who had bet that Peter would sue for peace in six weeks lost their wagers. So did those who had thought six months the likelier figure. The war begun at Narva lasted twenty-one years. For eighteen of those years Charles and Peter faced each other, enemies to the death.

Charles began by fighting for fun, but as the dreary struggle dragged on and he saw his reputation as a mighty warrior at stake, he found little fun in it. Again he was like the hunter, pressing doggedly on into the forest, grimly refusing to give up. When he kept on after it was evident to all the world that the Russian bear was too much for him, his friends concluded that he must have gone mad. He was no more insane than the duck hunter who chatters with oncoming pneumonia in an open blind, or the golfer who plays out his game in a sudden blizzard. The game had him in its grip. He could not have given up if he would.

Russian Peter was no sportsman, but a practical man. He was building a house, and it had to have windows. Without access to the sea, Russia was a house darkened and blind. His new Russia must let in the sunlight of progress, the fresh air of knowledge to drive out the old mists of superstitious

ignorance. He had hammered out a window on Azov, but it was not enough. The Baltic was to be his big new window, looking towards the west.

Peter did not enjoy war. He neither wanted nor accepted the personal glory that was the breath of life to Charles. He never pretended to be a military genius. War was a tool, to be used as such and laid aside when the job was done. It simply never occurred to him to lay it aside before that time came.

The efforts of Charles the Twelfth to defeat and dethrone Augustus of Poland are no part of Peter's story. They succeeded, but they took far more time than the Swedish king had estimated. This gave Peter a breathing space which he used to good advantage.

The men who had fled at Narva were rounded up, retrained and rearmed. Their best artillery had been lost. To replace it the tsar compelled the churches and monasteries to give up their bells to be melted down. A more rigorous system of recruiting was set up, requiring every noble and every religious order to provide a stated number of men from among their serfs.

Serfdom, a form of legalised slavery, had existed in Russia from the earliest days. It was not exactly the same thing as the chattel slavery of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but it was close enough.

In the century of Peter's birth it had grown to such proportions that a vast majority of men who tilled the land, worked the mines, did household or any other menial labour were serfs. Their "protector"—he was not called owner—had the obligation to

provide for them and their families, and to see that they were allowed the benefits of religion. In return they must do the work he demanded and submit to "reasonable discipline," interpreted according to his discretion. They could not be sold outright, but could be bequeathed by will and transferred as dowries or for the payment of debts. The crown could requisition them for war or for public works in the same way that it could commandeer cattle. A man's wealth was estimated in land, in rubles, and in "souls," meaning serfs.

Peter, in spite of his liking and sympathy for the common man, accepted serfdom as a necessary evil, much as the founders of the American republic accepted Negro slavery. Serfdom was not abolished until the reign of Alexander II in 1861. That was the year before Abraham Lincoln issued his first Emancipation Proclamation freeing Negro slaves in the American republic.

Scattered fighting with the Swedes continued in Ingria and Livonia while Charles the Twelfth busied himself in Poland. The Russians did not always lose. At Erstfer in January, 1702, they had their first real victory. It was on a small scale, but it was heartening. As Peter said, "At last we have beaten the Swedes when we were two to one against them. By and by we shall be able to face them man to man."

This success was followed by another in July of the same year. Several Livonian towns were taken, among them a village called Marienburg. The Russian general decided to make this town his headquarters. For his household he chose a few servants

from among the villagers. One of them was a young girl named Martha Skavronsky. She had been housemaid to a Lutheran pastor, who recommended her as a very fine laundress.

A few weeks later Peter sent his friend Danilovich Menshikov with dispatches to the general. Menshikov was attracted to the pretty washer-woman, and offered her a situation in his Moscow home. He was very particular about the fluting of his ruffles, he told her. The simple girl, quite flustered at the thought, stammered that she would be only too happy to go.

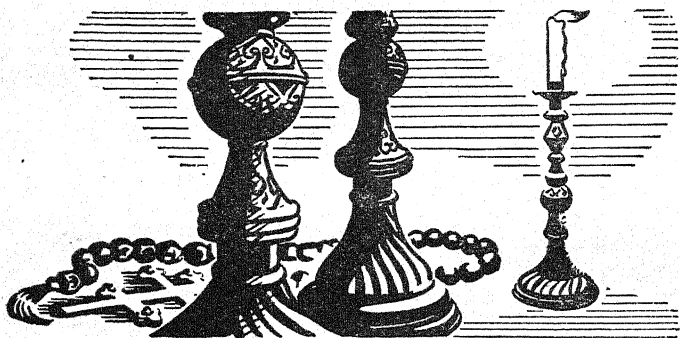
Martha was just seventeen. She was round-eyed, rosy-cheeked, pleasantly dimpled and plump. She could not read or write. But she was intelligent and quick-witted, good-natured and kind.

She had the happy gift of adapting herself to any situation. She settled down comfortably in Menshikov's house, laundering his fine linen shirts, waiting at table and making herself generally useful. The other servants liked her for her cheerful willingness to undertake any amount of work without complaint. Menshikov's old aunt, who suffered from rheumatism, claimed that Martha's strong hands rubbed her pains away.

Peter met the girl in Menshikov's home early in 1704. He was thirty-two, with a fourteen-year-old son and an unloved wife shut away behind convent walls. His life had not been without its passing romances, but now for the first time he found himself genuinely in love.



Martha Skavronsky.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CATHERINE

DANILOVICH MENSHIKOV had come a long way since the early days when he served as Peter's page. During the stay in Holland he had enrolled as a shipbuilder with the tsar and shared his humble lodgings. He had none of Peter's love of manual labour, but his ingenious devices for escaping it were a source of perpetual amusement to his master. He insisted that he could learn as much by seeing the work done as by doing it, and although this was incomprehensible to Peter, there was truth in it. Aside from Peter himself, Menshikov was almost the only one of the "company of learners" who really learned anything on foreign soil.

The knowledge that Menshikov picked up was not confined to shipbuilding. He had a shrewd business instinct that made it easy for him to grasp the complexities of trade and translate them to Peter. His greatest gift was his uncanny knowledge of human

nature. Lefort found him very useful in appraising the foreign dignitaries the embassy encountered.

After Lefort's death Menshikov succeeded to his place as Peter's closest friend and adviser. Foreign diplomats reported to their governments that this man "had the tsar's ear" and would repay cultivation. In consequence he found himself the recipient of flattering honours from abroad. Hungary made him a count; the Emperor of Austria created him a prince of the Holy Roman Empire. This title was confirmed in Russia, and it is as Prince Menshikov that history knows him.

Peter had shown his confidence in him by giving him, not empty titles, but posts of real responsibility. When he took from the Swedes a strong fortress on Lake Ladoga, he rechristened it Schlüsselburg and named Menshikov its governor. Menshikov was also the first governor of the new city of St. Petersburg.

Danilovich had a very fine house in Moscow. His duties kept him away from the capital most of the time, but his Aunt Anisya Tolstoi and his sister Anna lived there. With them lived two young ladies, the Arsenyev sisters. Menshikov was engaged to one of them.

Peter and Menshikov had been for some months on the island in the Neva where the new city of St. Petersburg was rising. They returned for a week in Moscow about the first of January, 1704. Menshikov went to his home, Peter to Preobrazhensk. The tsar was in high spirits when they parted. He was looking forward to a visit with his son, whom he had scarcely seen since the war began.

The Menshikov household had just finished supper when Peter knocked at the door. He was in a mood of black despair.

"You must give me a bed, Danilovich," he said. "The Preobrazhensk palace stifles me; I can neither eat nor sleep there. I'll stay with you to-night. Tomorrow I'm going back to the Neva. There at least I can *breathe*!"

Menshikov put an arm around him. The great shoulders were shaking as if with chill, the eyes were wild.

"Of course, of course, Petrushka, everything shall be as you wish," Menshikov soothed him. "We're happy to have you here. Come to the fire and let me give you a glass of wine. Have you eaten?"

"I couldn't eat, I tell you! No, no food, Danilovich. It would sicken me."

He sank into the arm-chair beside the fire. Menshikov's fiancée brought him wine, but he waved it away. Her sister and the Menshikov women fluttered about, bringing cushions, poking up the fire. Peter took no notice of them, but slumped in the chair, still shaking, his face twitching in the old muscular spasms of his boyhood.

Menshikov drew up a stool for himself. "Your troubles are my troubles, as well you know, Peter," he said gently. "Will you tell me what has happened?"

"It's my son!" The tsar pulled himself upright and burst into violent speech. "Danilovich, you wouldn't believe that a child of mine could be like that! You know how I love him; he's my hope of the future. Haven't I been a tender father? Have I

ever laid a hand on him in anger? You can bear witness that I told my sister he must never be beaten—no, not even to teach him obedience! What other father would be so soft-hearted?”

From the corner to which she had retired old Aunt Anisya spoke softly. “A growing boy must be beaten. There is no other way. All my sons were beaten. They grew up into fine men.”

Peter ignored her. “All that a father’s love could do for that boy I have done—you know it, Danilovich! It’s true that I see little of him, but is that my fault? I toil for Russia, the Russia that will one day be his. Wouldn’t you think he’d show some gratitude? Can’t he *see* what I’m trying to do for him?”

In a violent torrent his grievance poured out. Alexis had not welcomed his father. Peter had found him in his own room—“not a bedchamber, but a monk’s cell he has made of it, Danilovich!” surrounded by crucifixes and candles, prostrated before a representation of St. Ekaterina.

He had risen reluctantly, turning a dazed blank face to his father. “Drunken with prayer,” the tsar described it. Peter had been shocked at sight of him. Incessant fasting had wasted him to a pale skeleton. His face was a thinly covered skull, with blazing fanatic eyes.

“What do you think was the first word he said to me?” Peter demanded. “‘Father, is it well with thy soul?’ This was his greeting, after a year of absence. But that is not the worst, Danilovich! The ikon, the holy picture before which I found him—whose do you think was the face? Guess now. Whose?”

“You said St. Ekaterina, Peter.”

"Yes. But he has had her painted with the features of Eudoxia, the mother I ordered him to forget. It is true, Danilovich, I saw it with my own eyes. *My* portrait, the one the Swiss artist made for him, is nowhere to be seen, but *her* face is ever before him. I ask you, Danilovich, what sort of son is that? How am I better off than a man who has no son?"

He jumped from his chair and began pacing the floor. "Help me—comfort me, Danilovich! I cannot endure it! My head aches so I think it will split, and my heart—oh, that has split already! How can a man live in such pain?"

Old Aunt Anisya beckoned to her nephew. "For his broken heart we can do nothing, but if his head aches, I know a cure. Let me send for the Livonian girl, Danilovich."

He shrugged. "As you like, auntie. I don't think he'll permit it, but we can try. I'll call her."

"Who's this?" Peter demanded from the arm-chair into which they had coaxed him again. A smiling dimpled face bent over him, a voice spoke soft and sweet as chiming bells heard from a far distance.

"Only Martha, Sire, come to drive away your headache. If Your Majesty will just lean back——"

Very gently she pushed him against the pillows. Then, dropping lightly to her knees, she pulled off his heavy boots and propped his feet upon a footstool. They were icy cold, and she chafed them for a minute in her warm hands.

"A little wine first, just to warm you," she coaxed, and held the glass to his lips.

When he had drunk it she stationed herself behind the chair, pulling his head well back. Then with long, steady strokes she began to massage his aching head, working from his temples around to the base of the brain, where every nerve seemed tied in a tight hard knot. As she stroked she talked, keeping up a soothing little murmur such as a mother might use to a sick child.

The old aunt had complete faith in the healing powers of those rhythmic stroking fingers. She nodded triumphantly as the tsar's tense long body relaxed and the twitching muscles grew still. When presently his eyelids fluttered shut she spoke quietly. "His pain is gone. He will sleep now."

Peter did sleep, but only for an hour, during which Martha's ministering fingers never faltered. He wakened suddenly with a good-natured roar.

"Food! Danilovich, do you starve your guests? What——" Martha's hands had dropped to her sides as he sat up; she turned now and quietly left the room. "Who was that?" Peter demanded again.

Aunt Anisya chuckled. "My Livonian maid, Your Majesty. She has a fine touch with a headache, don't you think?"

"Headache—oh, yes, I remember, I did have a headache. Well, it's gone now. All I have is hunger. Ah——" he broke off as Martha came through the doorway with bread and meat and wine on a golden tray.

"So this is the miracle-worker," he remarked as she served him. "Tell me, child, are you a witch, that you carry healing in your finger-tips?"

Martha gave him her pleasant candid smile. "If

Your Majesty likes witches I will try to be one. Your Majesty has court fools and court singers. I should like very well the post of court witch."

"Then consider yourself appointed!" Peter laughed. Martha laughed back, and the Arsenyev sisters exchanged glances. She was very bold, this Livonian girl, chaffing the tsar with the same unself-conscious ease she used with the stable boys. Daria and Barbara would not have ventured on such familiarity. But if she pleased Peter it was not for them to criticise.

That Martha did please Peter very much indeed was plain. He left to Menshikov the errand that had brought them to Moscow, the requisitioning of two thousand thieves from the city prisons for hard labour at St. Petersburg. He spent his time with Martha, talking and laughing, learning Livonian songs from her and teaching her to use the drumsticks in the Russian military style. Wonderingly he proclaimed that he had never met a girl like this before.

He spoke sincerely. There were not many girls in Russia, or elsewhere for that matter, like Martha Skavronsky. She had none of the affectations that repelled him in ladies of quality, but she was equally lacking in the coarseness of a peasant. She loved a good joke as well as Peter did, but she could listen quietly and understandingly when he spoke of serious matters.

She earned her living by the work of her hands, doing that work with the easy deftness of a skilled craftsman. Peter admired that in her as much as anything else. He followed her about the house,

watching her iron, or churn, or mend her lady's cloak. Everything she did she did beautifully. She never complained, and she never, never scolded.

He was pleased, too, that she showed the same cheery comradeship to him and to all the world. Peter was always impatient of the servile deference with which he was surrounded; he found not a trace of it in this self-possessed young creature.

It was natural that he should compare her in his own mind with Eudoxia, whose difficult temperament had given him a low opinion of women. Martha, he was relieved to find, took her religion with the same sunny casualness with which she accepted everything else. She had been born a Roman Catholic, but had become a Lutheran at the urging of the clergyman who was her first employer.

"Would you change again and join *our* church?" Peter asked her one day.

She smiled up at him from her butter-making. "Why not? All Christians worship the same God, Pastor Gluck said. What does He care if I pray in one church or another? Just so I pray."

This was Peter's own view. In almost those very words he had defended himself when an Orthodox priest reproached him for visiting a Friends' meeting-house in London. It delighted him to hear it from the lips of this new friend.

"You don't feel your soul in danger?" he persisted. "They say that terrible things wait in the afterworld for heretics."

"I'm not afraid," she told him serenely. "I'll do the best I can in this world, and let the next take care of itself."

Peter was silent for a long while. What he was thinking it is impossible to tell. But at the end of his reverie he said abruptly, "I want you to become Orthodox. Will you be baptised to please me?"

"Of course I will. What does it matter?"

Peter went no more to Preobrazhensk that week. But when, towards the end of it, Martha's baptism was arranged, his savage humour returned. They were discussing a godfather for the girl, and Peter said grimly, "My son Alexis shall sponsor you. His only interest is in religious matters—we'll give him a chance to pray in public."

The boy was fetched from his home, and stiffly went through the ceremony. Martha received the new name of Catherine, with "Alexeyevna" added in honour of the tsarevich.

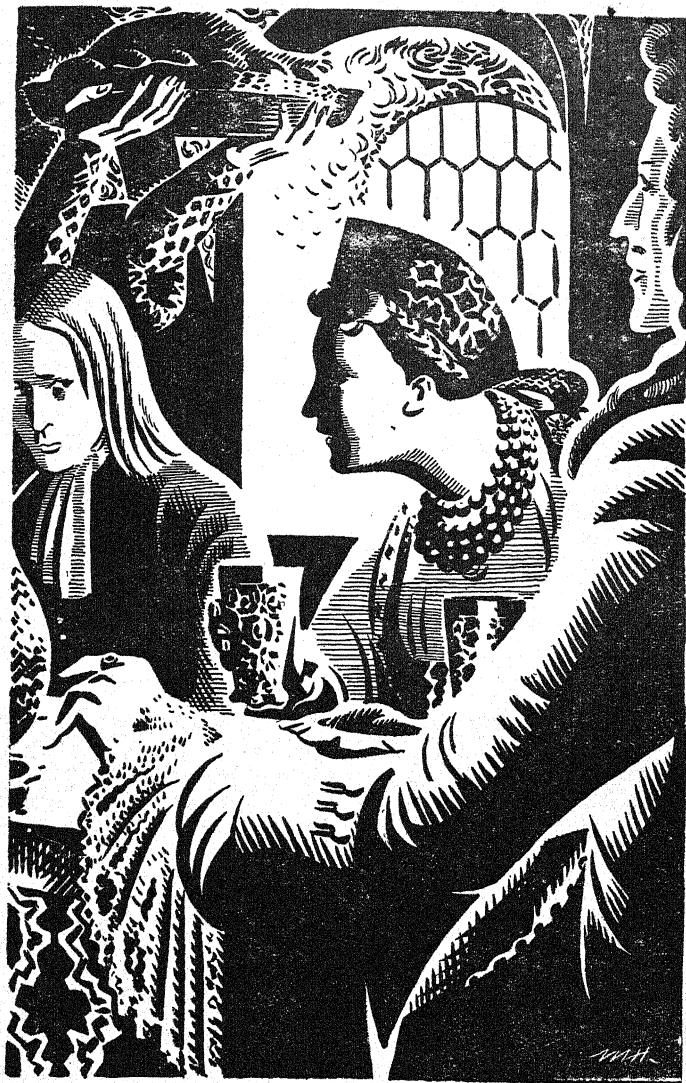
At the dinner Menshikov gave to follow the christening Catherine did her best to make friends with her young godfather. She felt sorry for the pale, thin boy, nibbling at a crust of black bread at the table burdened with rich food.

"Does your lordship suffer from a delicate stomach?" she asked him innocently.

Alexis frowned. "I fast for my sins."

"You do? What sins? They must be fearful ones! Do tell us about them."

He drew himself up in offended silence, and shortly afterwards asked his father's permission to leave the feast. Catherine had spoken in good faith, with a real curiosity to learn what offences a fourteen-year-old boy could have committed to exact such an extreme penance. But to Alexis her questions were sheer insolence.



She felt sorry for the pale thin boy.

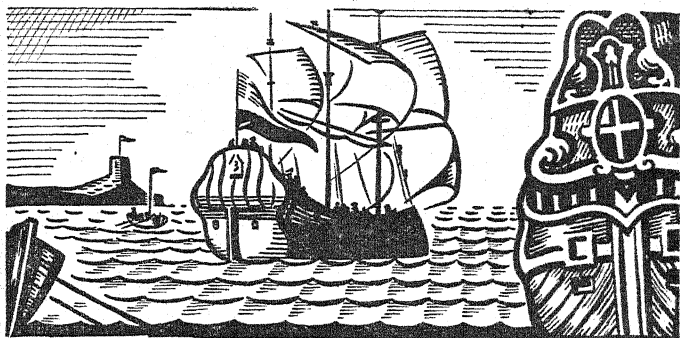
In years to come she was to try many times to win his liking. He could never think of her as anything but a light-minded woman without proper respect for sacred things. This was a pity, for if he could have brought himself to respond to her genuine friendliness his story would have had a different ending.

The day after the christening Peter regretfully tore himself away from Catherine. Before he left he made Aunt Anisya promise to come to St. Petersburg in the spring, bringing the Arsenyev sisters to visit Menshikov. "And bring Catherine, too," he added.

The old lady objected that the girl could not leave her work. Peter laughed. "Make her a lady-in-waiting, auntie—you need another. Buy her some pretty clothes and dress her up. Her days as maid-of-all-work are over."

With a sudden impulse he gathered the frail old figure into his arms. "You found her for me," he whispered. "May heaven bless you! Take care of her, for she is dearer to me than my throne."





CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PETER'S CITY

THE next day he hurried back to the city he was building. He named it St. Petersburg for his patron saint, using the German form instead of the Russian because a Dutch sea captain had told him Europeans were prejudiced against the outlandish Russian place names. Most people referred to it merely as Petersburg, "Peter's City." When World War I brought a revulsion against all things German the name was changed to Petrograd, "Peter's City" in Russian. Now it is Leningrad, "Lenin's City."

The River Neva, a brief forty-six miles long, flows from Lake Ladoga to empty into the Gulf of Finland. Near its mouth it divides into three or four branches, separated by a number of low, marshy islands. They were forest-covered and uninhabited except for a few fishermen. It was on one of these, called Hare Island by the fishermen, that Peter laid the foundations for his new city.

He built a fortress first, a strong stockade of logs with six wooden bastions. The second building was a church, erected inside the fortress and dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul.

Just outside the fortress Peter put up a one-story, three-room hut he called his palace. Menshikov had a larger one, because he was governor of the city. These buildings, with temporary huts for workmen, were erected in May, 1703. By January, 1704, when Peter reluctantly left Catherine in Moscow and hurried back to Petersburg, it was a town of three thousand wooden houses. Already he had decided that one day it was to be the new capital of Russia.

His reasons for this decision seemed good to him, if not to the people of Moscow. The old capital, deep in the heart of Russia, was isolated from the rest of Europe in those pre-railroad days. It could be reached only by horse and carriage over endless miles of wretched roads. Peter, eager to make his country one of the European sisterhood of nations, believed the chief obstacle was this lack of free communication.

St. Petersburg, with a good natural harbour, was to be a seaport. Its site at the head of the Finnish Gulf was the natural terminus of all the great sea lanes, where ships of every nation ploughed the Baltic and the North Seas. Peter envisioned them crowding St. Petersburg, as he had seen them crowding the port of Amsterdam, bringing the products of all the world to Russia, carrying back Russia's own wealth of mine and forest. There would be Russian ships, too, as good as any Dutch merchantman among them.

It was true the Russian ships were not yet built. True, too, that Sweden held the Baltic shores, permitting or forbidding passage at her pleasure. But Peter was at war with Sweden; he confidently expected to change all that with the final Russian victory. Already he had taken a number of forts with which the Swedes had thought to protect Lake Ladoga and the Neva. In these engagements he had, for the first time against the Swedes, been able to employ armed boats with good effect. He foresaw that naval strength would be a strong factor in their final defeat. St. Petersburg was to be a naval base as well as a centre for commercial shipping.

At the moment it was neither, but merely a chaos of mud and wood. Charles of Sweden, hearing that Peter was building a city on the Neva, laughed scornfully. "Let him build, by all means," he said. "It will be very convenient for us to have a city there when we annex Russia."

Peter was so thoroughly convinced of the desirability of a city on this site that he took no account of the practical difficulties. They were enormous.

There was no stone on any of the small Neva islands. Peter commanded that every cart and every boat coming to the city must bring a certain number of large stones. They were sunk into the marshy ground to make foundations for the wooden buildings. The soft mud swallowed them up and closed over them. It was impossible to anchor the log "pavements" of the streets; they turned into floating rafts and drifted out to sea. Occasionally a house drifted off in the same way.

Captain Perry, a British observer, was shocked to

see that the work was done with almost no tools. Russia was at war; her forges were turning out guns, not spades. Men scooped up the earth with their bare hands, carrying it away in the tail of their shirts or passing it into the hands of the men behind them.

Manpower, the cheapest commodity in Russia, was prodigally spent. Peter called upon the nobles and monasteries to send serfs, he brought in Cossacks and Tartars from the South, he used soldiers and prisoners of war and common criminals.

Working conditions could scarcely have been worse. The city lies within sixty degrees of the North Pole; throughout the long winter, temperatures of forty below zero are not uncommon. Spring and autumn rains brought floods, almost submerging the low-lying islands, washing away months of painful toil and many toilers. Food was scanty. Wolves from the surrounding forests stalked boldly into the streets. As late as 1714, when the city was long since finished and the capital of Russia, two soldiers on guard before the palace were torn to pieces by wolves. In those early pioneer days it was necessary to have bonfires flaming all night to keep wild beasts at bay.

Starvation and disease took their toll. Nothing that man could eat grew in the dense forest lands. The workmen who tried to lay out garden plots found that the sour, marshy soil would produce only one crop, a very tough and bitter black turnip. They worked fourteen hours a day at the most back-breaking sort of labour on a ration of turnip soup.

Cholera and typhus, malaria and dysentery swept the camp in successive waves. One hundred thousand men died in the first year, literally laying the foundations of Petersburg with their bones.

It was never quite so bad after the first year, for Peter made strenuous efforts to get food for his men, and better shelter. But in this he was handicapped by the war effort, not for a moment to be relaxed. His soldiers must eat, whatever happened to anyone else. The war was going on all the time, often within earshot of Petersburg. Peter divided his energies between the front, wherever it happened to be, between Voronezh, where he was building more and better ships, and the new city.

At Petersburg no workman could say that his tsar asked more of him than he was willing to do himself. Peter left his hut at dawn; when he drew off his boots at night he had put in a full day's work. He was everywhere, scooping up mud in his great hands, bending his back to the weight of foundation stones, joking and laughing with all of them.

The first ship, a Dutch one, sailed into Petersburg harbour late in 1703. It was followed by others, Dutch and English. Charles of Sweden had not dared forbid the Baltic to these great neutral powers.

Peter greeted the foreign ships with almost hysterical delight. They brought cargoes of ham, cheese, butter, and wine, very welcome to the starved young city; but they brought something much better in his eyes, the realisation of his dreams. Through his "window to the west" the fresh air of the outside world was streaming into Russia, just as he had planned it.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE SECOND BATTLE OF NARVA

AFTER crushing the Russian offensive at Narva in 1700, the Swedish king concentrated on his Polish enemy. The throne of Poland was elective, not hereditary. Augustus was Elector of Saxony when he became King of Poland.

Charles the Twelfth combined an unremitting military campaign with some clever political intrigues. Not all of the Polish nobility liked their German king. Charles, at a moment when the tide of battle was with him, let it be known that he would be willing to make peace with the Polish people, if they would get rid of their foreign ruler.

The result was that the Diet at Warsaw proclaimed the throne vacant. Shortly afterwards a group of nobles met under the protection of the Swedish army and chose a Polish citizen, Stanislas Leszczyński, as their new king. His name had been suggested by the Swedes.

Augustus, still in command of the army, refused to accept this arrangement. Charles therefore pledged himself to continue the war, not against Poland but against Augustus, until the throne should be firmly secured to Stanislas.

Russia's part in the war, from its beginning in 1700 until the summer of 1704, had been confined to the section around Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland. They had cleared a good part of this region of Swedish troops. In addition, Peter had raised men and money to send to his ally Augustus.

With Charles's friend Stanislas on the Polish throne, the Russians believed that the Swede would now throw his main force against their country. Invasion seemed likeliest by way of Ingria, the ancient Russian province lately regained. Where Ingria bordered Swedish Estonia there still stood the fortress town of Narva, which Peter had once assaulted, and where the war had begun in overwhelming defeat for him.

Peter consulted with his generals and decided that the time for reversing that defeat had come. Late in July, 1704, an army of forty-five thousand Russians encamped outside the city. They had one hundred and fifty pieces of artillery, adequate small arms, and plentiful ammunition. An able Russian field marshal, Sheremetyev, commanded. Peter was present with his bombardier company, still a captain, but Menshikov was Sheremetyev's chief of staff.

The first success was due to a typical stratagem of Menshikov's. The Swedish garrison at Narva was expecting reinforcements. Menshikov dressed a

number of Russian soldiers in Swedish uniforms captured on the Neva and staged a sham battle outside the town. The pretended Swedes approached the gates, and the garrison rushed out to assist them. Four hundred men were killed and fifty prisoners taken before the Swedes realized their mistake.

The siege ended in ten days of furious bombardment, destroying the protecting bastions. The Swedes did not surrender when the Russians rushed their defences, so the battle was finished in the streets.

The slaughter was fearful. The Russians, with a keen recollection of their humiliating defeat in this town, showed no mercy, killing soldiers and civilians alike, looting and burning.

Peter and Menshikov, who had stopped at the fort to capture the Swedish commandant, rode into the streets two hours after the battle ended. Peter was so furious at the undisciplined action of his troops that he jumped from his horse. Several soldiers had taken possession of a wineshop, stunning the old woman proprietor with their musket butts. Peter dragged them out, beating them with his fists. One of them at least he killed in the street.

He went on to the city hall, where he found the town councillors cowering in terror. He threw his dripping sword on the table before them. "Look, old men!" he cried. "That is not Swedish blood, it is Russian. Have no fear of my savages, for *I* am here!"

Shamed and chagrined over the action of his troops, he punished a number of offenders by death. In every possible way he tried to make up to the townspeople for their undeserved sufferings.

Soldiers were put to clearing rubble from the streets, to patching or rebuilding damaged houses. The little Lutheran church had been reduced to ruins, but Peter built them a handsome new one, large enough to hold the entire population.

When, in a couple of weeks, Narva was neat and tidy again, Peter felt he had earned a little relaxation. The projected visit of the Menshikov ladies to Petersburg had not occurred, because Danilovich declared there were no fit quarters there for his aged aunt. The pleasant little town of Narva had suitable accommodations, however, and it was more easily reached from Moscow. So at Peter's suggestion the invitation was renewed.

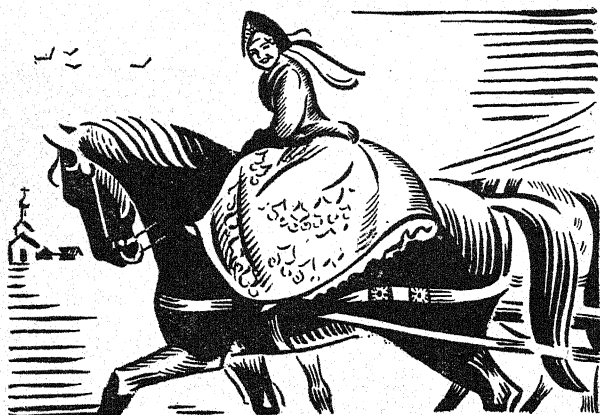
In the early autumn, travelling by coach and four, came the Arsenyev sisters, Anna Menshikov, Aunt Anisya Tolstoi, and the new maid of honour, Catherine Alexeyevna.

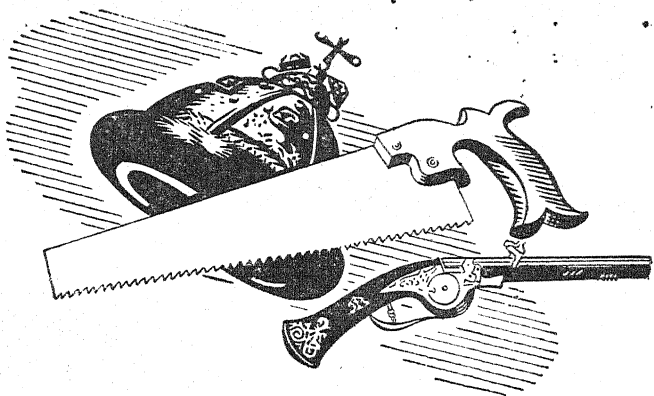
They had dressed the girl in new finery, billowing green satin over starched lace petticoats, her pretty brown hair crowned by the high beaded headdress of quality. Her hands, free of the washtubs, had grown soft and white. But they had not succeeded in making a lady of her. She rode the last lap of the journey mounted on one of the carriage horses, chatting gaily with the postilion, the coloured ribbons of her headdress floating in the breeze.

Peter and Danilovich had come out to the edge of town to meet them. Daria Arsenyev and her fiancé exchanged greetings of courtly formality, she stepping out of the carriage to drop her curtsy, he bending low to kiss her hand. But Catherine jumped

with a whoop of joy into Peter's arms, knocking him to the ground in her exuberance. Laughing uproariously, they picked themselves up and set off down the road. They did not take their eyes from each other's faces as the carriage passed them.

The taking of Narva had been a military feat of which Peter had good reason to be proud. He had wiped out the humiliation suffered there; he had shown Charles of Sweden that he was an antagonist to be reckoned with. But at this moment he might have been entering Narva, or Moscow, or heaven itself, for all he knew or cared. His love walked by his side, her voice in his ears, her hand in his, and Narva was heaven for Peter.





CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE CAMPAIGN IN POLAND

PETER stayed in Narva for three months, entertaining his fair guests with balls, sham battles, and country picnics. The Arsenyev girls, accustomed to city life, were hard to amuse in this little out-of-the-way village. Peter lived in constant dread that they would grow too bored to prolong the visit. Menshikov was ordered to rack his brains and think up charades, dramatic entertainments—anything to hold them back in Narva.

These amusements were not for Catherine's benefit. She cared no more for social life than the tsar himself. Their delight was to dress up in peasant clothes and mingle with the country people in the market place, eating their hearty food, joining in their dances and songs. Once they took over the village blacksmith shop, and Peter spent a blissful day shoeing farm horses under Catherine's admiring eyes.

The pause at Narva was not all vacation. Peter and Menshikov, with Marshal Sheremetyev and the English engineer officer Ogilvy, held frequent councils of war.

Ogilvy, for distinguished service in the capture of Narva, had been made a field marshal. His colleague Sheremetyev was not too pleased at the promotion. There were already friction between the two marshals, and between Ogilvy and Menshikov. Peter had his work cut out to settle disputes and get his counsellors to agree on a course of action.

It was apparent to all of them that the full burden of the war against Sweden must now be borne by Russia. By taking back the province of Ingria Peter had secured his access to the Baltic; he had also established himself in Karelia on the northern shore of Lake Ladoga. And with the fortress town of Narva he had gained a foothold in Estonia. These gains must be held.

To further the real purpose of the war, the opening of the Baltic Sea, such gains were only a beginning. Russia would need to take, and hold, the southern Baltic coast as far west as Prussia.

This is the territory shown on modern maps as the Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Estonia, except for the town of Narva, was firmly held by Sweden. Peter had regained the eastern part of Latvia, then called Livonia, but the coastal strip was the Duchy of Kurland, a Polish dependency occupied by the Swedes. Lithuania was under Polish sovereignty, but there also Charles had a strong army.

Augustus, dodging from place to place in Poland,

sent frantic appeals to Peter not to forsake him. His Polish soldiers were deserting to Stanislas, but he was calling on his own German state of Saxony for new armies. With them, and with Peter's help, he was certain he could turn the tide against the Swedes and regain his throne.

He might have saved his breath. It had not occurred to Peter to leave him in the lurch. To Peter's honest soul it was inconceivable that a man should desert an ally, however badly placed that ally might be. He had his own reasons for continuing the war, but even without them, Augustus could count on his pledged word. He was surprised and a little hurt that his friend should need to be reassured of this.

It was eventually decided, there at Narva, to carry the war into the enemy's territory. Instead of waiting for Charles to invade Russia, the Russians would move on Poland.

Peter and his generals returned to Moscow in December, 1704. "Our ladies," as Peter affectionately calls them in his letters to Menshikov, were left there in Menshikov's home.

According to plans already made, Marshal Sheremetyev set off for Kurland, with a strong force. The other section of the army, under Ogilvy and Menshikov, and accompanied by Peter, marched into Lithuania.

It was the summer of 1705 before anything more than indecisive skirmishes were fought. Then in July of that year Sheremetyev suffered a bad defeat in Kurland. Peter's army, hurrying to his aid, took a couple of towns, but found themselves unable to

attack the strong fortified city of Riga, to which the Swedish army had retired.

Winter was coming on, and there was rebellion among the Cossacks of the Volga. Peter decided to send Sheremetyev back across Russia to deal with the rebels, while the major part of the army went into winter quarters where they were.

They chose the town of Grodno on the Niemen River for their base. About sixty miles south-west some Lithuanian legions were encamped. Peter, going to arrange liaison with them, was just in time to welcome Augustus.

The Polish king was back from Germany with his boasted Saxon army—actually a force of less than six thousand men. He assured Peter, however, that “countless thousands” had been raised, and would soon join him.

Augustus considered himself a mighty military genius. Peter’s own pretensions in that field were extremely modest, more so than was necessary. He had a deep-seated conviction that no Russian could understand the science of modern war as well as a foreigner could. There had been occasions when this reliance on foreign officers had led to disaster only to be retrieved by Peter’s own rough common sense. But the conviction persisted.

He did not, therefore, make any objection when Augustus confidently announced that he would take command of the allied armies. The Britisher Ogilvy did object, but Peter pointed out that Menshikov would remain as the tsar’s personal representative, and any disputes could be referred to him.

Peter was anxious to get back to Moscow, where

a number of matters awaited his attention. There was every reason to believe that the winter would see no action on the Polish front. Charles was at Warsaw, busy with the coronation of the new king Stanislas. It was thought that the Russian and Saxon forces could put in a few quiet months resting at Grodno, waiting for spring weather before starting a new campaign. Peter was so sure of this that he returned to Moscow, leaving Augustus in supreme command.

They had reckoned without Charles of Sweden. He lingered in Warsaw only long enough after the coronation to sign a treaty of peace with Poland. By this act Augustus, if he continued the struggle, did so as an outlaw, unsupported by the Polish government.

Charles left Warsaw late in December, making such speedy progress across the frozen fields that he came within sight of Grodno on January 24, 1706.

He crossed the Niemen River within two miles of the town, but decided against attacking it until reinforcements came up. He retired to a village fifty miles away and settled down to wait.

The Russian command was thrown into confusion by the unexpected appearance of the enemy. Ogilvy, who had just completed a new line of earthworks around Grodno, was convinced they could hold the town against any assault. Menshikov feared the Swedes would encircle them and cut them off from Russia. He therefore advised retreating before Charles had time to move.

The decision was put up to Augustus, the supreme commander. He, called Augustus the Unsteady by

his own German people, veered from one view to another and finally emerged with a plan of his own. Menshikov should write to Peter and ask him what to do. In the meantime, Augustus himself would take his Saxons and go look for the invincible German army which must certainly be half-way across Poland by this time.

Peter had scarcely arrived at Moscow when the letter came. He had important things to do there; chiefly the raising of money to carry on the war.

Some of the foreign officers, Ogilvy among them, were hinting pretty strongly that if pay-day didn't come soon they would feel their martial ardour melting away. Ogilvy sent a letter by Menshikov's messenger, giving his opinion that Charles did not intend to attack Grodno at all, but that if he did, the town could easily withstand him. "And," he ended, "Your Majesty will not forget that my pay is now six months overdue."

Peter, confused by all this, wrote Menshikov that he was leaving at once for the front, and suggested that his friend meet him on the road with the latest news.

They met at a village sixty miles west of Smolensk. Menshikov had to report that, as he had feared, Charles had moved to surround Grodno. It would be impossible for Peter to get nearer the town, but messengers could slip through the lines with word to Ogilvy.

Peter wrote to Ogilvy, telling him to remain in Grodno if he had food for three months, and if he had sure news that Augustus was returning with the Saxon army. Otherwise, he wrote, it would be

best to dump the heavy artillery into the river and retreat into Russia by the quickest route.

From early February until late March Peter waited in the little village of Dubrovna, sending letters to Ogilvy and getting replies which were nothing but complaints against Menshikov and demands for his salary. Peter, still trusting the foreign general's judgment, did not give a direct order to retreat until the end of March.

Augustus never made contact with his new Saxon army, but it really existed. Thirty thousand brave Germans, hand-picked for physical strength, beautifully uniformed and outfitted, attempted to cross the border into Poland. They were met by eight thousand Swedes. The Germans threw down their shiny new rifles and ran without firing a shot.

This was to have been the relief for which Ogilvy waited. As soon as Peter heard the news he sent a peremptory order into the town. Ogilvy was to abandon it at once and return to Russia.

The retreat, planned by Peter and Menshikov from the outside, was a masterly affair. Preparations were kept secret, so that the garrison was clear of the town before Charles realised what was happening. Instead of taking the direct road east, as he expected, they struck out south-east towards Kiev. Peter sent the Cossack leader Mazeppa with fresh horses, and men to guide them through the forests.

Charles gathered his scattered forces for pursuit, but he was too late. Between Grodno and Kiev lies the River Pripet, and the famous Pripet marshes. Charles's wagon trains sank to their hubs in oozy mud, softened by the spring thaw. Mazeppa's

Cossacks knew the territory and led their comrades swiftly by obscure forest trails the Swedes could never find.

In the end the Swedish king was obliged to give up the chase, ignominiously ending his first invasion of Russia proper. He turned back at the town of Pinsk, laying it waste as a final gesture.

Then, with one of his lightning decisions, he moved in an entirely new direction. He marched upon Dresden, capital of Saxony, and home-town of Augustus.

The Saxons, taken by surprise, offered no resistance. Charles entered the city peaceably and sent envoys to Augustus, still groping about Poland trying to win back powerful nobles. Sweden was ready to spare Saxony, Charles said, if Augustus would give up the Polish venture and come home.

The Swedish terms were harsh, and Augustus began bargaining in an attempt to get better ones. The negotiations dragged on for months. During part of this time Augustus was a guest of Menshikov. He tried to keep the terms secret, talking loudly of the vigour with which he would prosecute the war as soon as he could gather his brave Saxons about him. When some hint of the bargaining leaked out, Augustus assured Menshikov that he was only fooling the Swedes by pretending to talk peace.

Charles would not modify his terms, and in the end Augustus accepted them. He renounced his claim to the Polish throne and agreed to break all alliances against Sweden, including the Russian one.

Peter was in Moscow when the news was brought to him. He refused to believe it. Augustus was his

friend, his beloved comrade, closer than a brother. At their first meeting on the plain of Rava the two giants had exchanged swords, as a sign that they were one in purpose. Never while life lasted, they had sworn, would one betray the other.

A German resident with business connections in Saxony brought the first report to the Kremlin. The man was a respectable merchant, but Peter had him stripped and flogged for slander. All too soon, however, confirmation came from official sources, and with it the shameful details.

Augustus had been with Menshikov's army when the Russians gave the Swedes a sound beating in a minor battle. For this he had written Charles a letter of apology, stating that he was only a spectator, and deeply regretted that the battle had taken place. He had written to Stanislas, his successor, congratulating him on his elevation to the throne of Poland. And he had surrendered to torture and death the Russian ambassador to the state of Saxony.

It was this last perfidy which stunned Peter. The Russian ambassador was the Livonian Patkul, a close and devoted friend of Augustus for many years. He had been loaned to Peter so that Russia might make use of his great gifts in diplomacy. Peter liked and respected him, but it was Augustus who was his patron, Augustus who had profited most by his long service. And it was Augustus who had callously delivered him over to the executioner.

There were those among Peter's advisers who urged him to follow the example of Augustus and make peace with Sweden. Charles had his foot on the neck of Poland; he had forced his will on Saxony

without the need to fire a shot. In spite of the fact that Russia had had some success against him, there was a strong feeling that the Swedish warrior-king was invincible.

Peter, no lover of war and always willing to be reasonable, did agree to let his representatives at the various European courts put out peace feelers. If he were allowed to keep the territory he had gained around Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland, which had originally been Russian, and if he were allowed peaceful passage through the Baltic for his ships, he would ask no more.

These suggestions were put to Charles by the French minister. The young king answered arrogantly, "I would sacrifice the last Swedish soldier before I would give up a single town to the savage."

The form of the rejection infuriated Peter as much as its content. Charles was not alone among Western Europeans in classifying the Russians as savages. Peter, whose whole life was given to establishing his country among civilised nations, felt the insult far more keenly than his fathers would have done. To the old Russians it was the outside world that consisted of savages; only in Holy Russia did true civilisation exist.

Peter made no more overtures of peace. If Russia must stand alone against the Swedish might, she would stand. She would not surrender, and in the end she would not be beaten.

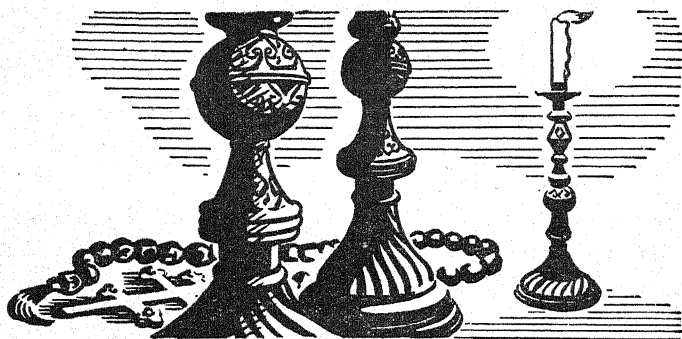
Charles, for all his swashbuckling, could be cautious. He did not immediately move against the Russians. Peter had nearly a year, all of 1707, to get ready.

He began to withdraw his forces from Poland and Lithuania, concentrating them on the Russian frontier, which he strengthened with a long line of fortifications.

Against the expected invasion, he worked out a plan of civilian defence for the frontier villages. Hay or grain, as it was harvested, must not be stored in barns, but hidden at designated points. These secret granaries were deep in the woods, camouflaged with foliage. They included cattle-pens.

At the first sign of invasion, the villagers were to set fire to their homes and drive their horses and cattle before them into the forest, leaving only blazing ruins behind them. The plan was a sound one, and it still works, as the invading armies of Adolf Hitler learned in World War II.





CHAPTER TWENTY

THE NEW TSARITSA

AMID these warlike preparations, Peter snatched time for the most important personal event of his life.

Menshikov had married Daria Arsenyev in the summer of 1706. In November, 1707, Peter was their guest, having just returned from an inspection of the forts around Petersburg.

On the second day of his visit Peter summoned a few friends to Menshikov's house. There were two or three officers he could trust, his sister Natalia, and his son Alexis.

The hour he had named was in the early morning. As they assembled in the great hall of Menshiko's palace they noted that the table was laid for a feast.

"Really, Peter, you grow more eccentric every day," Natalia said as she kissed him. "Who ever heard of giving a banquet at this hour? Have you some new foreign delicacies for us to try? And was

this why your invitation told me to eat no breakfast?"

"So many questions, sister dear!" He laughed excitedly. "I hope you're not too hungry. I asked you to omit breakfast because it is not permitted to take food before Mass. The feast comes afterwards."

She stared at him. "You have brought us here to go to church? With you? But, Peter, how strange!"

The Tsarevich Alexis, who had entered with her, permitted himself a thin smile.

"Strange indeed, Auntie, that my father should bid us to church. I had not thought the Lord's grace worked so powerfully within him."

"And it is for church that you have dressed so grandly in foreign clothes?" Natalia persisted. "That satin coat, the lace ruffles—why, you look like a Frenchman, Peter! And you are wearing a powdered wig, too. Since when have you given up your Dutch carpenter's costume?"

"I haven't given it up. It's the most sensible garb a man can find," Peter said stoutly. "But this is a special occasion. I intend—ah!"

He broke off as Daria Menshikov entered the room, leading Catherine by the hand. The little group of officers echoed his gasp of admiration.

Catherine wore a long dress of red Chinese silk, heavily embroidered in gold thread and pearls until every inch was covered with a twining flower pattern. Neck and wristbands were of close-set pearls. Over the thin dress was thrown an open robe of crimson cloth, and over that a short fur-lined mantle of cloth of silver. Her thick piled braids were interwoven with coloured ribbons, and high

above them sat a golden coronet supporting a white Kashmir veil. It was the traditional costume of the Russian bride.

Peter took her hand. "My dear friends," he said proudly, "I have the honour to present to you the lady Catherine Alexeyevna, who within the hour becomes my wife. I invite you now to come with us to the Church of the Holy Trinity to see us wed."

Menshikov had spent an exhausting hour getting Peter into the trappings of nobility, but he had not neglected his own toilet. Very handsome in blue brocade and lace, he dropped on a silken knee to kiss Catherine's hand. "My devotion, Your Majesty," he murmured.

The other officers pressed forward to follow his example, but Natalia's gentle face was bewildered.

"Are you allowed to do this, Peter?" she asked. "Catherine is a lovely girl, and I'm sure we all want you to be happy. But—but——"

"Don't worry, dear, I've arranged everything. Give your new sister a kiss, now."

Smiling, she obeyed. Only Alexis stood aloof, arms folded, his long face set in stubborn lines.

Peter clapped him on the back. "Well, my son? Go and kiss your new mother."

Alexis jerked away from the friendly hand. "My mother," he said harshly, "is the nun Helen in Pokrovski Convent."

"Ah, but that was your *old* mother," Peter laughed. "This is your new one—and a much prettier one, as you'll have to admit. Go on, boy, bid her welcome."

Alexis drew himself up. "That I can never do.



It was the traditional costume of a Russian bride.

As I have but one mother, Father, so you have but one wife. God has ordained it."

Peter's face darkened, and Menshikov quickly interposed.

"Surely you know, Alexis, that when your mother took the veil she renounced all earthly ties. Those who enter the convent are dead to the world."

"And for that you have the word of the clergy," Peter told him. "Do you take me for a fool, boy? I'm as good a Christian as you—yes, better, for I make some allowance for the human heart, as it seems you do not. But come now, we mustn't quarrel on my wedding day. Father Nicholas is waiting at Holy Trinity to perform the ceremony. If he has no objection, why should you have?"

"Father Nicholas is only a priest. If you have bribed him to this sacrilege——"

"You don't understand, Alexis," Menshikov put in. "Your father has had this matter under discussion for two years. The important heads of the church have been consulted. I admit some objections were raised, but they have all been overcome. Holy Church will give its blessing to this marriage."

"Indeed? Then why," the boy demanded, "is it being done in this hole-and-corner fashion? A handful of people bidden to assemble in secret. What tsar of Russia was ever married in such a manner? Where are the processions, the crowds in the streets? What sort of wedding is this, that it must be hidden?"

Peter flushed. Alexis had touched upon a sore point. The Orthodox Church is very stern about divorce. And though it was true he had brought a few powerful members of the clergy, chiefly the

head of Trinity Monastery, to agree that Eudoxia's taking of vows ended her marriage, the agreement was by no means unanimous.

Whatever the clergy might rule, the conservative boyars were certain to feel as Alexis did. Peter was risking a great deal in making the former servant girl his wife, but his love was so great that he was willing to risk anything. Only Menshikov's urging had prevailed upon him to make the marriage a private one.

He had been over this ground at wearisome length with his advisers. He was in no mood to cover it again to please Alexis.

"Enough of this," he said shortly. "Give Catherine your arm, Alexis. You are her godfather. You shall escort her to church."

The boy drew back, his long, narrow face working. "I will not countenance this blasphemy! You cannot compel me, Father!"

Natalia hurried into the gap as peace-maker. "But your father has explained, Alexis; he has consulted the clergy. Come now," she coaxed, "it isn't the first time you've gone to church with Catherine. Why, you were her sponsor in baptism. Of course you must go to her wedding."

"It was my Christian duty to help any sinner find salvation in the true faith," he answered coldly. "That duty is done. But this woman has mocked our holy religion. She has used her carnal beauty to bewitch my father, to lead him into mortal sin. For it is sin, Father—you cannot fail to know what you are doing!" He turned his blazing eyes upon Peter. "You have a living wife, my sainted

mother. You *cannot* marry another woman! I forbid it!"

"*You* forbid it! You!" His father's voice shook with rage.

"Yes, I!" Alexis moved suddenly and blocked the doorway. "Kill me if you will, Father. But only over my dead body shall you leave this room on such a mission!"

He was only eighteen, and he had never before dared to oppose his father. He had worked himself to such a high dramatic pitch that very likely he expected to die there. Others in the room held their breath as Peter's hand went to his sword hilt, for the tsar's temper could be terrible.

Catherine's soft voice broke the tense silence. "Peter, dear, must I wait all day for my wedding? Alexis need not come unless he wishes. One of the other gentlemen will give me his arm. Let's not spoil this happy day by quarrelling."

Peter's brow cleared instantly. "You shall go to church on your bridegroom's arm, darling. What does anyone else matter?"

With an arm around her waist, he swept her to the door where Alexis waited, defiantly erect, but with fear looking out of his pale eyes. With his free hand Peter picked him up by the back of the neck and deposited him sprawling in the nearest chair, as one would a troublesome puppy.

The wedding party closed in, laughing and chattering. Peter, with his arm around Catherine's waist, with her voice murmuring in his ears, had already forgotten the unpleasant incident. The heavy door clanged behind them.

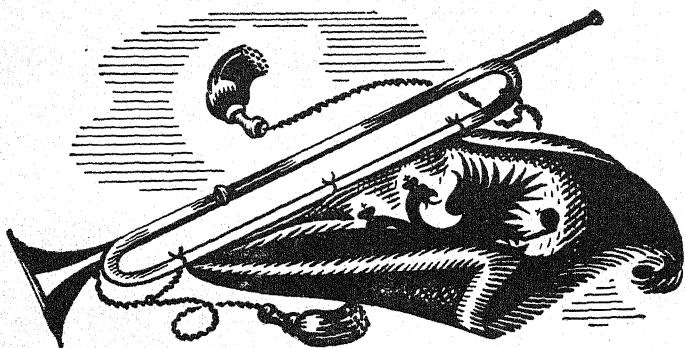
The tsarevich, cowering in his chair, sobbing in wild humiliation, did not forget. Later, when he told the unhappy story to his confessor, Father Ignatyev, he was warmly praised and commended for his noble stand. The priest was so pleased that he devised a reward for his pupil, one great enough to heal all his wounds of the spirit.

Two weeks later Father Ignatyev made one of his customary visits to the Pokrovski Convent, where he still ministered to the soul of the nun who had been Eudoxia Lopukhin. With him this time went a young servant, who was admitted without question to the sacred portals.

Peter had declared his first wife dead to the world, and dead to him. She was not dead to her son. Alexis made many visits to the convent, pouring out his grievances against his father, receiving his mother's sympathy and counsel.

Peter knew nothing of this. It would have been better if he had known.





CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

TRIUMPH AT POLTAVA

PETER's honeymoon was a short one. Before the New Year he left his bride in Princess Daria Menshikov's care and hurried to Lithuania to extricate the last of his forces there.

He was anxious that the coming show-down with Charles be fought out in Russia itself. Communications and supply, the unglamorous services which bitter experience had taught him were most important, could best be maintained there.

And he had learned that Russians fight best on their own soil, defending their homes against the invader.

Everyone believed that Charles would strike for Moscow, either from the north through Livonia or from the west through Smolensk. Peter's generals agreed that one of these would be his logical route, and there was confirmation from spies sent into the Swedish lines. Charles contributed to this impres-

sion by proclaiming to all the world that he would dictate peace terms from the Kremlin.

There is no doubt that he meant it. Moscow was, and remained, his final goal. But with his genius for surprise moves, he planned to approach it by the roundabout way, first capturing the Ukraine and so coming up from the south.

He had approached this southern territory before, in pursuit of the Russian army retreating from Grodno. Then the Russians, under the guidance of Cossack natives, had threaded their way safely through marshy forests, leaving the baffled Swedes floundering in the heavy mud. Charles did not expect to repeat the mistakes of that disastrous campaign. This time he would wait for winter, when the frozen ground made passage easy. And this time he would have the Cossacks on his side.

Mazeppa, hetman of the Cossacks, was an old man past seventy. He had served the Regent Sophia first, and then Tsar Peter. In his own opinion, he had never received from them the rewards and honours his service merited. He let it be known in the Swedish camp that he was open to a reasonable offer.

Charles responded with lavish promises. Mazeppa was in a strong bargaining position, for Peter, concentrating on the north and west, had entrusted the Ukrainian sector to Mazeppa and his thirty thousand Cossacks.

Charles crossed the Dnieper into Russia on August 16, 1708. At first he turned northwards, toward Smolensk and the road to Moscow. Then, convinced that he had thoroughly misled the enemy, he turned around and headed south, leaving a force under

General Lewenhaupt to carry out a delaying action.

In October Charles reached Starodub on the north Ukrainian border. Mazeppa had agreed to meet him here, but there was no sign of him. The young king settled down to wait for him and for Lewenhaupt.

The Swedish general arrived first, with bad news. The Russians had not long been deceived. They were sending a mighty army south under Menshikov. Its advance guard had attacked Lewenhaupt's diminished command, reducing his eleven thousand men to six thousand. He had lost artillery and a quantity of stores, including all the medicines the Swedes possessed.

Mazeppa turned up about the first of November, bringing with him not thirty thousand men but a bare fifteen hundred. The Ukrainian Cossacks, cut off from the rest of Europe, knew nothing of the all-conquering Swedish king. They did know the power of the Russian tsar. Only a handful of them were rash enough to defy it.

Mazeppa, who had boasted of the mighty army ready to follow wherever he led, put the best face he could upon this sorry showing. They were not far from Baturin, the Cossack stronghold. Let King Charles march in and show his might there. It would be easy to win over the stubborn Cossacks when they saw with their own eyes the strength of the great Swedish army.

The traitor had a persuasive tongue. Lewenhaupt, smarting under his recent defeat, was eager to place these new legions under the Swedish flag. It was agreed to proceed at once to Baturin.

The expedition left Starodub December 1. Charles

had chosen a mid-winter campaign, but he had not reckoned with that terrible winter of 1708-9.

Never in the memory of man had Europe known such ferocious cold. The Baltic Sea froze so solidly from shore to shore that loaded wagon trains crossed over from Prussia to Sweden. Men died of cold in the poorly heated law courts of Paris. There was skating on Venetian canals. On the wind-swept plains of Russia it was far worse. Birds, it is said, fell frozen to death as they flew through the air.

The Swedes, getting farther and farther from their Polish bases, ran short of food. Their medicine had already been lost by Lewenhaupt's bad luck. A Swedish officer, in a bitter letter home, writes, "We have only three doctors, Doctor Brandy, Doctor Garlic, and Doctor Death. When the first two fail us, we can always rely upon the third to cure us."

They never reached Baturin, for it no longer existed. The Russians, under Menshikov, had arrived there first, removed all the loyal inhabitants, killed those they suspected of favouring the Swedes, and burned the city to the ground.

Instead of turning off for Baturin, Charles continued south, finding a haven in the small town of Gadyach when the suffering became unbearable. They stayed here for several weeks, ravaging the countryside for miles around, bringing in what food and fodder they could find, tearing down peasants' huts for firewood. Three thousand Swedes had frozen to death on the terrible march. The town hall was turned into a hospital, where the surgeons worked all day sawing off frozen limbs.

Menshikov, miles to the east, was cautiously paralleling the Swedes' march south. He was in no hurry to give battle. The longer Charles's lines of communication became, the more General Winter took upon himself the task of killing Swedes, the easier it would be for Russia in the end.

In February Charles took up the march again. He moved about rather aimlessly for some three months, hoping to rally the peasants to his side, but being met more often than not by villages already blazing, their inhabitants and stores safely hidden in the forest.

In the course of this restless march and counter-march he was at one time perilously close to the shipbuilding city of Voronezh on the Don. Peter, certain that he meant to attack Voronezh, hurried there with his army.

The city, with its command of the river and its stores of grain, would have been a valuable prize. That Charles did not try for it is unaccountable, except upon the simple theory that he did not realise how near it was. He was in completely unfamiliar territory, he had no trustworthy maps, and the inhabitants were more likely to mislead than to guide him.

Mazeppa, who must have known, was in disgrace and sulking. His fifteen hundred men had deserted, melting quietly into the steppes, taking their arms and horses with them. Many had joined the Russians. Charles, who in the beginning had treated with the hetman as an equal, now made him an orderly with the duties of a personal servant.

As spring advanced, the melting snows made

progress difficult. Icy water seeped through broken Swedish boots; flour turned mouldy from the damp; firewood was too wet to burn. Of the forty thousand men who had left Starodub, the Swedish army now counted only twenty thousand. Ten per cent of these had lost arms or legs from cold. Morale was breaking down, and Charles decided there was only one thing to do. At any cost, he must hearten his men with a victory.

His generals thought they had a better cure for war weariness. "Let us," they urged, "get out of this accursed southland. We have ranged over endless miles of it, and to what purpose? There are no towns here, no warehouses to loot, no wines and fine foods. What good would a victory be to us if we had one? Better far to go back to Poland. There, in warm dry houses, with food and drink and medicine, we can strengthen ourselves to move on Moscow, where there are gold and furs and jewels worth taking."

So spoke the generals, with the voice of common sense. Charles would have none of it. He had marched into Russia; he would march out when they crowned him with a victor's laurels in the Kremlin. Then, and not until then, would he lift his foot from Russian soil.

However, the argument that a real victory meant a chance of loot appealed to Charles. If that was what his men wanted, he would give it to them.

He called in Mazeppa and demanded the name of a good-sized town in this forsaken region. A prosperous town it must be, with food and drink and feather-beds to cheer his weary soldiers.

Mazeppa considered. "Well, there's Poltava, Your Majesty. No city, but the largest town hereabouts. It might do."

"Tell me about Poltava. How is it situated?"

"It lies fifty miles to the south of us, Sire, on the west side of the River Vorskla. It commands a mountain pass leading to the Tartar caravan route to Moscow. Much produce from the south passes through it."

"Commands the Moscow road, you say?" The king's eyes glistened. "That will be convenient, for in the end we march to Moscow. And a commercial city, too—there should be rich booty there. Enough!" He brought his fist down on the table. "Send the generals to me, Mazeppa. Poltava it is!"

So, by the free choice of one of them, the battleground between Charles and Peter was fixed. They had been at war for nine years; now, in the sleepy little Ukrainian town, they were to come within sight of each other for the first time. This battle was to shape the destinies of their two countries and to alter the map of Europe.

Charles of Sweden could not guess what hung upon his decision. To his generals he outlined an easy capture of an unimportant trade centre—a victory valuable chiefly for its cheering effect upon his tired soldiery. He thought it was a good omen that the town commanded the road to Moscow. That by choosing to give battle at Poltava he was fatally tossing away all possibility of ever coming within sight of Moscow's towers he could not know.

The coming battle loomed scarcely larger in Peter's eyes. He had gone to his beloved Voronezh in desperate haste to make it secure against the invader. When nothing happened, he lingered on to watch the shipbuilding. Catherine came to him there, and Daria Menshikov with her new-born son. Peter wrote to Menshikov in the field that little Peter Luke, his godson, had had his first boat ride.

The letter followed Menshikov from camp to camp on the Ukrainian plains before it caught up with him. His reply reached Peter at Azov, where he had gone after the ladies returned to Moscow.

Menshikov enclosed a dispatch from General Allart, commandant of the Poltava garrison. The Swedes, the general wrote, had appeared before Poltava and were besieging it. Menshikov himself, with a small detachment, had hurried into camp behind the town, on the east bank of the Vorskla. He was in communication with Allart by means of letters concealed in hollow bombs shot across the river. He urged Peter to come at once with reinforcements.

The siege had begun on May 12. Peter arrived on June 15 with a force which, combined with Menshikov's, brought the Russian strength up to fifty thousand men.

The stage was set, but the curtain was long in going up. There were minor skirmishes, in one of which Charles received a bullet wound in the foot, crippling him so that he could not sit his horse. But the real battle did not begin until Thursday, July 8, 1709.

For all its great significance, it was not much of a

battle. It lasted two hours, and only the Russian front lines were engaged. The Swedes began it with an attack on the Russian breastworks, from which Peter's cavalry swarmed to overwhelm them. The Swedes, outnumbered four to one, fought bravely, but they never had a chance.

Neither Peter nor Charles was the sort of commander who seeks safety when the bullets fly. They were both in the thick of it; Peter mounted a white horse, Charles rather uncomfortably in bed.

The unfortunate Swede, unable because of his crippled foot and its accompanying fever to ride or stand, had his camp bed slung on poles, with a trooper's horse fore and aft. He carried a pistol in each hand, and managed to kill some Russians in spite of his disabilities.

To Peter the battle was a keen disappointment because it was never possible for him to see his opponent. He had not fought Charles all these years without wondering about him. With his natural curiosity was mingled a great deal of respect. Through the drifting battle smoke he peered towards the disorganised Swedish ranks, eagerly trying to catch a glimpse of the fabulous northern hero.

All he saw, in tantalising snatches, was a cot bed, its blankets trailing, jerked madly from one spot to another by rearing horses. Then a cannon ball snapped the supporting poles, and the litter crashed to earth. It was hidden from Peter in the wild confusion of maddened horses and fleeing men.

He waited eagerly in his headquarters for the officers who had surrendered to be brought to him. There was a rumour that Charles, badly wounded,



All he saw was a cot bed jerked madly about.

was among them. Peter had his own doctor standing by.

The unconscious man who was carried in and laid upon Peter's own bed was not Charles, but one of his aides-de-camp. With him they brought Count Piper, prime minister of Sweden, and four other members of the cabinet. There were also one field marshal, six generals, the auditor-general of the army, fifty-nine staff officers and five colonels. Seventeen thousand privates and non-commissioned officers were taken also, and fifty personal servants of the king.

"But the king—where is the king?" Peter demanded. "Surely some of you must have cared for him—you cannot have left that great man lying helpless on the battlefield? That would be a shameful thing!"

The Swedish officers were silent. Peter sent his own men to search the bloody field. Charles must be saved if he still lived. If not, he should have at least the burial suited to his rank.

The search was unsuccessful, and after a safe margin of time had gone by, Count Piper told Peter what had happened. Charles, in great pain and so weak that he had to be lashed to his saddle, had fled southwards, accompanied only by Mazeppa and a hundred cavalymen, to the protection of the Turks.

Peter sent Menshikov in pursuit, but the Russians arrived just in time to see Charles cross the Dniester River into Bessarabia, a Turkish province into which they could not follow him. The Swede took refuge at Bender on the Dniester, where the Turkish governor offered him safety.



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

FRUITS OF VICTORY

THE triumph at Poltava, so sudden, so overwhelming, dazzled all Europe. Very little had been known except that the mighty Swedish king was invading Russia; European capitals had expected that the next news would be a report of the surrender of Moscow.

When, instead, it was learned that the Swedes had done the surrendering, Russia's stock shot violently upwards. Almost overnight, Peter "the savage" became a knight in shining armour. The petty German states had held their breaths since Charles strode into Saxony. Now they hailed Peter as their deliverer. A British cartoonist had always pictured him as the Russian bear, shaggy and uncouth. Now he published a new drawing, showing the tsar as a Russian St. George triumphantly slaying the Swedish dragon.

This adulation meant nothing at all to Peter, but

it had some strange effects in Europe. For one thing, King Stanislas of Poland was so impressed that he offered to resign his crown. And Augustus, back in Saxony, saw his hopes of regaining it bloom again. He sent a message to his dear friend Peter, urging him to meet him, that they might clear the "little misunderstanding" between them.

Peter's mail contained other invitations. The king of Prussia begged the honour of a visit. The king of Denmark sent an envoy to congratulate him upon the victory, and to propose an alliance against Sweden.

Peter took all these flattering requests in the order of his own convenience. Augustus had hurried back to Poland with a Saxon army, and was waiting at the town of Thorn, north of Warsaw.

Peter made a leisurely journey to Warsaw, receiving the congratulations of the Polish senate. He found them thoroughly disgusted with the part Stanislas had played, governing Poland for the benefit of Sweden. They urged him to restore Augustus. Peter heard this request with a stony face, and made no answer.

He moved on to Thorn. Augustus received him humbly, acknowledging his treachery, begging for forgiveness. Never, he declared, had he known a night's tranquil sleep since that unhappy day. Charles had deceived him, had terrorised him, had made all the mischief.

"There was the matter of Patkul," Peter reminded him bluntly.

Augustus wept. Peter would never know how that infamy weighed on his conscience, he told him.

He was having prayers said in half a dozen churches for the repose of Patkul's soul. Again he put all the blame on Charles. He had not dreamed that the unfortunate Livonian was to be executed—Charles had promised that he should be put under house arrest, with every consideration shown him.

It was Charles, all Charles, that wicked Swede who had sown dissension between two sworn brothers! With tears streaming down his cheeks, Augustus begged Peter to let bygones be bygones and take him to his heart again.

Peter was deeply moved. So he would have felt, if some villain had beguiled him into betraying a friend. All men make mistakes, allow themselves to be persuaded to acts their better nature disapproves. Who among us is perfect?

What the Polish senate had failed to do by reasoned argument, Augustus accomplished by tears and tender sentiment. With great-hearted generosity Peter told him to forget the past, to look upon it as an evil dream. All should be as before, he promised.

Only one small revenge he permitted himself. "I see," he remarked as they embraced, "you no longer wear the sword I gave you."

Augustus had presented the sword to Charles, as proof that he repudiated the Russian alliance.

Blushing and stammering now, he said, "I am so sorry! There is nothing I prize so highly. But through the stupidity of my servant, it was left behind when I hurried here from Dresden."

"Then," said Peter, "let me give you another."

He produced the sword itself, which had been found among the baggage left by Charles at Poltava.

With burning cheeks Augustus buckled it on, and the two friends rode forth to receive the acclamations of the townspeople.

The Danish envoy came to Thorn, and a treaty was concluded there. Representatives of Austria, of France and England, of all the great powers, hurried to the Polish town to assure the new hero of their sovereign's warm friendship. When Peter sailed down the Vistula to pay his visit to Frederick the First of Prussia he took with him the pleasant consciousness that his country was considered of importance in the world.

Tangible proof of this was waiting in Prussia. King Frederick was anxious to form an alliance with Peter's country, and to cement it by marrying a Prussian princess to Peter's son.

This strengthening of political ties by royal marriages was the custom in Europe, but so far it had never prevailed in Russia. European power politics had seldom taken Russia into account. No royal house had seen any advantage in allying itself with the "savages," and the old Russians, with their hatred of all things foreign, would never have sought such an alliance.

Peter had already thought of a foreign wife for Alexis. As early as 1707 he had instructed his ambassadors to sound out the various governments on the subject. However, they had received no encouragement. It seemed at the time that Charles must certainly conquer Russia, and no king wanted to risk his displeasure.

Now Peter found Frederick of Prussia only too



He produced the sword itself.

willing to discuss it. He had a princess in mind, a daughter of the house of Wolfenbuttel. The girl was very young, and the project did not get beyond exploratory conversations, but it was informally decided that the matter would be taken up seriously in another year or two.

The shrewd Prussian king had a second matrimonial alliance in mind for good measure. He had a young nephew who claimed the Duchy of Kurland, the Baltic coastal strip which Peter had taken from the Swedes. If Peter would produce a bride from his own family for this boy and give them the throne for a wedding present, everyone would be happy.

Peter's only use for Kurland was to oppose Swedish control of the Baltic. With the little duchy in friendly hands its coast would be open to him, and also the coast of Prussia adjoining it.

Anne, daughter of his dead brother Ivan, was of suitable age. They consulted the young duke, but no one bothered to ask Anne what she thought. Peter knew too well that she would be delighted. The girl was a favourite of Peter's, and shared his enthusiasm for everything foreign. To become a German duchess would seem to her the height of good fortune.

Peter employed most of the autumn after Poltava in leisurely travel. Before returning to Moscow he went to St. Petersburg, and worked out plans for further improvements. With the crushing defeat of Charles he now felt certain for the first time that his new city would be permanently his. On the very night of the battle he had written to a friend, "Now,

with God's help, the last stone has been laid of the foundation of St. Petersburg."

He laid out public gardens and decided on plans for the Admiralty buildings. The town had overflowed the original island, and now covered not only several other islands, but both banks of the Neva. Peter sent orders to Moscow that the nobles were to build for themselves "lordly dwellings" in the new city and spend at least part of the year there. They obeyed sullenly. The conservatives who hated Peter for his reforms hated Petersburg almost as much. It was never a popular capital.

At the end of December Peter returned to Moscow. A gigantic fête in celebration of the Poltava victory was planned for him. But when he reached his suburban palace at Preobrazhensk he found a private joy that drove all thought of public festivals from his mind. Catherine awaited him there with his new-born daughter, Elizabeth. The entry into Moscow was put off for two days, while the old palace rang with thanksgivings.

On the Monday following, the procession moved into the city streets, spanned by the usual arches. Twenty thousand Swedish prisoners, captured at Poltava and at a later victory in Finland, marched before the victorious legions, trailing their dishonoured battle flags in the dust.

The Swedish officers, who had been allowed to keep their swords, escorted the empty horse-drawn litter from which their king had directed the battle. The Swedish big guns, rusty and mud-splashed, pulled along by hand, were a testimony to Russian might. Behind them the Russian artillery rolled,

muzzles filled with flowers, horses decked with ribbons.

It was far more than a splendid military parade. Peter had delayed his celebration for months, that envoys of all the foreign powers might be present.

Before their dazzled eyes the entire Russian empire was passing in review. There were wild-riding Cossacks and turbaned Tartars, sailors from the fleet bearing a twenty-foot model war-ship, complete with guns and flags. Miners brought all the way from the Urals marched solidly, shouldering their pickaxes. There was a camel corps from Azov, and a company of dancing bears. Boyars of the great houses, each attended by his personal body-guard of from eighty to two hundred men, gave a glimpse of the old Russia in gleaming armour and six-foot pikes, but the well-armed, smartly drilled regular troops warned that a new day had dawned.

Prince Ramodanovsky, governor of Moscow, was host at the banquet that night. His guests included not only the victorious Russian generals and the foreign diplomats, but also the captive Swedish officers. With a great deal of amazement the foreigners heard Peter ask the company to approve his own promotion from colonel to lieutenant general.

The system by which Peter progressed from rank to rank in the Russian army was always perplexing to everyone but himself. Yet it was very simple. Beginning at the bottom, when he thought he had earned promotion he consulted his superior officers.

There is no record that any of them ever disagreed.

But he never presumed on his power. He was a sergeant for years, and might have remained one indefinitely. The war had forced him to take on responsibilities outside a sergeant's duty, and he had asked for rank accordingly.

To-night, when his own generals unanimously confirmed his promotion, he asked the approval of his fallen foes. The Swedish officers, bewildered but honest, agreed that if any of their colonels had played such a rôle in such a victory, they would certainly recommend promotion. Peter, thoroughly satisfied, then accepted a general's stars from Ramodanovsky.

Moscow gave over the entire week to celebration. The bells of her forty times forty churches rang day and night, firework displays lighted the winter dark, there was dancing in the streets.

The Russians believed that they were celebrating the end of the Swedish war. Following Poltava, they had had further successes in the north, securing the part of Finland known as Karelia, completing the conquest of Livonia, and strengthening their hold on Ingria.

Peter had his Baltic outlet, and Augustus was in a fair way to regain his throne. The objects of the war, so far as Russia was concerned, had been attained. Peter was ready to quit. He naturally supposed that his defeated enemy was of the same mind.

He was wrong. Charles the Twelfth, who had escaped capture at Poltava by fleeing into Turkey, was not finished yet.

The Turks had a grievance against Peter because of his occupation of Azov, and they looked with alarm upon the strong naval base he had built at Taganrog. Already Russian merchant ships were moving down the Don and out into the Black Sea, convoyed by Russian men-of-war. It was a feeble trickle as yet, but the Turks saw it as a threat to their dominance of the Near East.

Charles played upon these fears. At first he was not successful. The Sultan of Turkey had felt Peter's might before; now, when he was a hundred times stronger, it seemed foolhardy to provoke it again. The Sultan indeed was so anxious to conciliate Russia that he offered to deliver up the traitor Mazeppa, who had shared Charles's flight. This came to nothing because the old man died before negotiations could be concluded.

Charles, finding that he could accomplish nothing at Constantinople, went to Crimea, where the Khan was in a more warlike mood. The Crimean Tartars, although they had their own government, were subjects of the Turkish empire. They had hated the Russians for hundreds of years; it was not difficult to rouse them to action.

Charles induced the Khan to go to Constantinople and demand that the Sultan declare war upon Russia. The fiery Khan succeeded in convincing his master that war against Russia was not only advisable, but that it had every chance of success.

As soon as this decision was taken, in December, 1710, Turkey declared war by seizing the Russian ambassador, Count Tolstoi, and sending him to the Prison of Seven Towers.



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DISASTER ON THE PRUT

PETER welcomed Turkey's declaration of war for his own reasons. If his dreams of ocean-borne commerce were to be fully realised, he knew that sooner or later he must challenge Turkey's control of southern waters. Now, in the first flush of victory over the mighty Swedes, with his army at the peak of its strength, it seemed as good a time as any.

He planned to attack Turkey, not as before through Crimea, but along the western shore of the Black Sea, in the Turkish Balkan provinces. This was good military strategy, for the Balkans were in a chronic state of rebellion against their Turkish masters. From them he was assured of full co-operation.

By making this decision he gained, almost by accident, an overwhelming popular support at home. The Balkan peoples were of the Orthodox faith; their masters were Moslems. Russia saw her war as

a religious crusade to liberate oppressed Christians from the Moslem yoke. Peter, to his secret amazement, found himself for the first time basking in the approval of the clergy.

This was very gratifying as far as the war was concerned, making it much easier to raise men and money. But it had another value Peter was quick to seize upon.

His marriage to Catherine in 1707 had been private, but by no means secret. Everyone knew about it, but no one spoke of it. Catherine did not preside with him at state functions, and did not officially have the title of tsaritsa. While Eudoxia lived on in her convent Peter had never quite dared to antagonise conservative opinion by publicly giving her place to another woman.

Now, however, when the clergy was hailing him as the "Redeemer of Christendom," he felt that the time was ripe. One by one the higher churchmen were sounded out, and none was found to raise a voice against his proposal. So on March 6, 1711, in the Cathedral of the Assumption, prayers were asked for Her Majesty, the Tsaritsa Catherine Alexeyevna.

There was no second ceremony, since the first one had been entirely legal. But Peter gave a tremendous feast, at which Catherine and her ladies sat at table with the men. The boyar guests, at the tsar's command, brought their wives and daughters. The old days of Oriental seclusion were over. From that day onwards, Russia's women have played their part in their country's destiny.

The Tsarevich Alexis was not present at the

banquet. Peter had invited, or rather commanded, his presence, but a servant brought word that the youth was ill of a fever and could not leave his bed.

Alexis was finding ill-health a great convenience nowadays. During the campaign against the Swedes Peter had enrolled him as a private soldier, expecting that the boy, now twenty-one, would follow in his father's footsteps and work his way up through the ranks.

Alexis threw himself upon the ground at the end of the first day's march and sobbed that he could not rise. Menshikov gave him a horse, but the animal threw him and he refused to mount again. He was shifted around in various posts, but always became too ill to fill them. It was whispered among the soldiers that he ate poisonous weeds to bring about a disabling sickness.

On the night of the marriage feast, although he was too ill to attend, he was able to receive Father Ignatyev. Perhaps the visit of the priest revived him, for he found strength to make the long jolting carriage ride that same night to the Pokrovski convent, where he mingled his tears of rage with those of his forsaken mother.

Peter had already ordered two divisions of his army into Moldavia, just south of the Polish border. Moldavia and the province below it, Wallachia, are now part of Romania.

The old names are confusing. Many of them have disappeared entirely. What we now call the Balkans were some dozen small states, originally Roman colonies, but in Peter's time vassals of the

Turkish empire. They had their own princes, called *hospedars*, and were undisturbed in their religious and social customs. The "brutal oppression" of which they complained amounted to very little more than the payment of taxes.

The *hospedars* of Moldavia and Wallachia had given handsome promises of support to the Russians. The first Russian legions had scarcely arrived in Moldavia before it was apparent that this support was not to be forthcoming.

These Balkan provinces had their boyars, too; landed gentry who looked upon all change with suspicion and feared to risk their wealth by moving against the Turks. Whether the two princes were traitors or simply helpless is not clear. It is a fact that the Balkan peasants delivered quantities of food and forage to the advancing Turks, but not a bite for man or horse was available to their Russian "liberators."

Peter, with a company of dragoons, left Moscow in March, 1711, moving through Poland. He had been ill in Moscow, and was not yet fully recovered. He made no objection when Catherine offered to go part way with him. It would be pleasant to have her company on the easy march through friendly Poland; she could return by comfortable stages when they reached the border.

They approached the Dniester, where Poland ended and Moldavia began. Here, Peter said sadly, he must tell his wife farewell. She would go back to Moscow and pray for his victorious return. "To-morrow, darling, it is good-bye," he told her.

"To-morrow, Peter," she said quietly, "you must

find me a good horse. The carriages can go back to Moscow with my maids. I ride on with you."

Nothing he could say shook her determination. She had suffered enough while he was away at the wars before, not knowing from day to day whether he lived or died. Surely he could not be so cruel as to subject her to those agonies again?

"But the danger, my heart!" he protested. "Don't you think it will be agony for me to know that you are at the mercy of any chance bullet? How can *you* be so cruel?"

She laughed, the carefree laugh he loved so well. "Maybe it's my turn to be cruel now! After all you made me suffer, why shouldn't I? But really, darling," she coaxed, "there's no danger. You've been in a hundred battles without a scratch—why, you boast of it! And I shall be with you, always, like your very shadow. How can I be hurt when you never are?"

Laughing, joking, but calmly resolute, she wore down his objections. Her little daughter was safe and happy with Daria Menshikov. Certainly she could ride a horse. And why should he think she would miss the soft beds and dainty foods of Moscow? Did he not remember that the first seventeen years of her life had been spent in grinding poverty? Hardships were no novelty to her.

"And besides, Peter mine," she added, "you need me. What if you should be ill again? Your army surgeons can extract a bullet, but have they healing in their hands? I have, you know. You must not send my healing hands away, dear love."

In the end she prevailed. The retinue of ladies was sent home, but a cavalry horse was found for

Catherine. She sat it like a trooper, astride, her velvet gown kilted to her knees, a cocked hat perched blithely on her coronet of braids.

She ate the food of the common soldiers, as Peter did. She led their songs, bandaged their wounds, wrote down their dying messages and promised faithfully to care for their orphaned children. She was "Little Mother" to the whole army. In the dark days that were to come she repaid their devotion by saving the lives of some thousands of them.

The Russian army, thirty-five thousand strong, marched deeper into Moldavia and found that the promised provisions were only promises. The peasants, having at the orders of their lords already delivered everything to the Turks, displayed empty granaries.

The barren plains were grasshopper-ridden, so that scarcely a blade of wild grass could be found for the horses. The Russians were obliged to make long waits while food could be brought from Poland. They were three months reaching the bank of the Prut River, where on the opposite shore the hosts of the Sultan awaited them.

The Turkish commander was the Grand Vizier Baltagi Mahomet, second in importance to the Sultan himself. That illustrious soldier Charles of Sweden had been refused a Turkish command, and was sulking in his near-by camp of Bender. He did not take part in the battle of the Prut.

Peter established his camp on the Prut shore early in July, 1711. They were outside range of enemy guns across the river, but those guns cut them off



She sat it like a trooper.

from the only water supply. It was an extremely hot, dry summer, no rain fell, and the grasshoppers were everywhere. They suffered from heat, from hunger, but most of all from thirst.

The Turks, reinforced by Tartars, had, according to reliable accounts, two hundred and fifty thousand men to Peter's thirty-five thousand. They took their time, letting thirst and famine do their work for them. When the Grand Vizier felt the enemy was sufficiently weakened, he crossed the Prut and surrounded the Russians on three sides, leaving the Tartars across the river to complete the square. Then he attacked.

The battle, begun on July 21 and lasting three days and nights, was a bloody business. On the first day the Russians killed seven thousand Turks, obliging the rest to withdraw temporarily. But within the hollow square formed by earthworks and wagons the Russians counted sixteen thousand of their own dead by the third day. Their ammunition was giving out, they had no food or water or medical stores. But still the square held firm and did not break.

On the third night Peter held a council with his generals. Only two courses were open to them. They could die fighting to the last man, or they could surrender. What surrender to the Turks meant they all knew. Slavery was a legal institution in Turkey. Prisoners of war were sold in the open market, to man the great oar-driven galleys which carried Turkish commerce on the high seas. Surrender literally meant enslavement for life.

Some of Peter's generals counselled a fighting

death; others observed gloomily that it was better to be a living slave than a dead hero. At the end of the hurried, helpless discussion Peter retired to his tent, ordering his officers not to disturb him. Catherine came to him there.

There are varying accounts of what passed between them. Some say she persuaded him to let her act as she did; others that she soothed him to sleep and moved without his knowledge. What is certain is that, picking her way among dying men, with shells bursting all around her, she found Marshal Shermetyev on the battle-field and dictated a letter for him to sign. It was to the Grand Vizier, asking for an honourable truce.

According to Oriental custom, important messengers approaching the Sultan's representative brought gifts with them. To send a man with the letter but otherwise empty-handed would be an admission of defeat. At all costs, the mission must be made to appear the dignified communication of one sovereign power to another. There had to be presents.

Catherine was hard put to it to find suitable offerings in the war-scarred camp, but she did her best. The few jewels she had brought with her, her cloak of black fox-skins, and a little Swiss watch Peter had given her were piled in a forlorn heap. She added an embroidered silk petticoat and a down coverlet. Shermetyev contributed his diamond-set miniature of the tsar, and other officers brought gold-mounted pistols and a few gold coins.

A trusted officer took the peace offering and the letter and rode out to the Turkish camp under a

white flag. He was received with the utmost courtesy by the Grand Vizier, who offered him food and wine while he waited for the reply.

Catherine had worded the letter very carefully. It acknowledged that the Russians were outnumbered, but spoke of certain reinforcements which were expected at any moment. Then, emphasising the Turkish dead but making no mention of Russian losses, the letter bemoaned the fearful waste of life over a matter which could surely be settled by reasonable discussion between honourable men.

Fortunately, only honourable men were involved. Baltagi Mahomet was afterwards blamed by Charles of Sweden for not demanding Peter's life as a condition of settlement. But the Swedish king's glory was already considerably tarnished in Turkish eyes by his attempt to gain control of the Turkish army. The Grand Vizier, having his power disputed by the royal visitor, was not asking his advice.

Baltagi Mahomet had not favoured the Russian war in the first place, believing that the Sultan had been swept into it by the Crimean Khan's insistence. He knew that the reinforcing army of which Catherine wrote was real, although he did not know how far away it was. Russia's man-power was inexhaustible; it was unlikely that in future battles the Turks would again have such an advantage in numbers. Altogether it seemed to the Grand Vizier an excellent moment to conclude an advantageous peace.

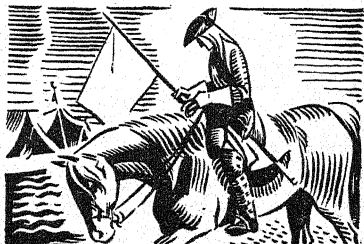
He sent Catherine's messenger back with a courteous reply, stating that he was not averse to a fair

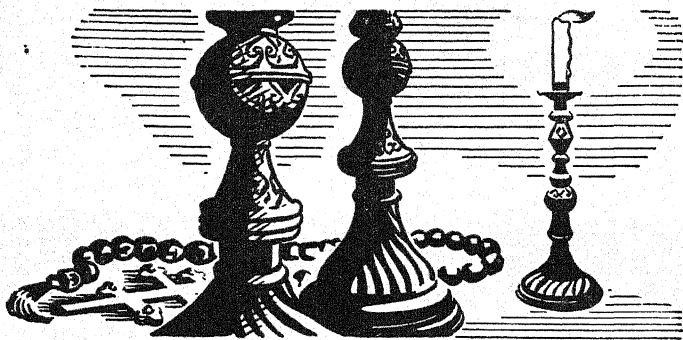
peace, and asking the tsar to send somebody with power to negotiate.

The terms eventually agreed upon were not favourable to Russia. Peter agreed to give up Azov and Taganrog, and to withdraw his forces from the Balkan provinces.

The war that had begun so gloriously as a crusade against the Moslem was ending in defeat. But the Russians had lost their sympathy for the "oppressed Christians" of the Balkans. They had not seemed to be unduly oppressed; "nor," as Peter wrote in his journal, "seeing that they denied us food and drink, did we find them such marvellous Christians." His weary legions had their lives and their freedom. They were glad enough to give up and go home.

As soon as the terms of peace were settled, the Grand Vizier opened his army stores to the hungry Russians, selling them whatever they needed at generously low prices. The exhausted soldiers, saved from death or slavery by Catherine's intervention, were touchingly grateful to her. They pooled their coppers to buy from a Turkish sergeant a huge enamel brooch in glaring red and green lozenges. It was a hideous thing, and she wore it proudly ever afterwards, calling it "my decoration of the Prut."





CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MARRIAGE OF THE TSAREVICH

PETER did not return to Russia with his battered army. His health was worrying Catherine. He had three serious illnesses in two years, and had never taken time to recover from any of them plunging into strenuous campaigning. She insisted now that he give a little attention to his own welfare.

They went to the charming little Polish town of Thorn, arriving there in September of 1711. A Polish doctor called in by Catherine recommended that Peter go to Carlsbad for the famous medicinal waters. Peter went, leaving Catherine in Thorn.

He found the town, filled with elderly invalids, dull and uninteresting. After dutifully drinking the waters for a few weeks he returned to Poland for his son's marriage.

Frederick the First of Prussia, who had proposed this union immediately after Poltava, had let two years go by before concluding the final arrangements.

While Peter was campaigning on the Prut Alexis was in Dresden, making the acquaintance of his bride-to-be. This had been his own suggestion, and while his father suspected it to be an excuse to escape military service, he had given his consent. Alexis might possibly be of some use in winning foreign friendship; it had long since been clear that he would be of no use whatever on the battlefield.

Princess Charlotte Wolfenbttüel was a lovely little *fräulein* of eighteen, with golden yellow hair and big blue eyes. She had grown up under the guardianship of Christine Eberhardine, divorced wife of Augustus. They had never expected to find a royal husband for her. The match was painted in such glowing colours that the girl was completely dazzled. The Russian court, of which Queen Christine knew nothing, was represented as a fairyland, and Alexis as the Prince Charming of every girl's dreams.

Charlotte had docilely given her consent to the marriage before she saw her Prince Charming. It must have been something of a shock when Alexis presented himself at Dresden.

Alexis, who had none of his father's spirit, was equally lacking in Peter's robust good looks. The boy was tall, but thin and stoop-shouldered, walking with an awkward slouch. He had a long, horse-like face, with Eudoxia's little peering eyes. His straight hair fell in lank strings to his shoulders. Commanded by his father to wear European dress, he had his coats cut as long as he dared, so that instead of ending at the knee they sagged half-way to his ankles, in a feeble imitation of the sweeping boyar robes. He was not very clean.

The little princess made a gallant effort to overlook these drawbacks. She could not know that she was seeing Alexis at his very best. He had left Father Ignatyev behind him; there was no one to remind him that these light-hearted Germans, so fond of music and dancing, were sinful heretics doomed to everlasting perdition.

For a few brief summer weeks the wretched boy allowed himself to relax and become a human being. Whatever affection his shrivelled heart contained went out to this dainty child they had found for him. It was a happy young pair that went to the altar at Torgau.

The wedding was held at the country estate in Saxony where Queen Christine lived. Peter was present, but Catherine was not.

An awkward situation arose when the wedding plans were made. Alexis had always flatly refused to acknowledge Catherine as his father's wife. There was reason to fear that if she came to the wedding he would make some sort of scene.

Catherine, with her usual tact, decided she was not well enough for the journey. They compromised by making it not a state affair, but a quiet family wedding with only the bride's close relatives and the groom's father present.

It was celebrated in the chapel at Torgau on October 24, 1711. Peter, meeting his new daughter for the first time, was greatly pleased with her.

Time after time he had made plans for his son, only to be disappointed. This time it seemed that the way was really open to the realisation of his hopes. Alexis had failed as a soldier, he had

stubbornly refused to learn any of the manual trades in which his father delighted, he had opposed everything new and spent his time in the company of priests. Now, however, Peter hoped to see a change. Alexis was a bridegroom, with a girl's happiness in his charge. Now if ever he would pull himself together and play the man.

Peter found a new job for him. He was sent to Thorn, where provisions were being bought for the troops. Alexis, who could not or would not fight, surely could be trusted to buy grain and keep accounts. Charlotte went with him. They had a pretty little cottage, and their married life began pleasantly enough.

Catherine and Peter did not stay long in Poland. War clouds were gathering again, and a new campaign was in the making.

The Russians, when they asked an armistice on the Prut, had supposed that peace with the Turks meant peace with Sweden also. The Grand Vizier soon made it plain that this was not the case. With scarcely veiled contempt he said that the Swedish king was a fugitive enjoying the hospitality of his country, not a sovereign entitled to a voice in its affairs. Turkey would settle Turkey's war with Russia, but the Swede must make his own arrangements.

Charles, from his Turkish refuge, sent word to Sweden that the war was to continue. As soon as he could persuade these stubborn Turks to give him an army he would be with them. Until then they were to carry on without him.

He remained in Turkey for three years, wearing

out his welcome to such an extent that he was finally arrested. He escaped in disguise. When he returned to the scene of battle he brought no army with him.

In the meantime, however, the Swedes dutifully followed his orders, and continued to fight in the Baltic. Denmark and Saxony offered to help Russia drive them back to the Swedish peninsula. The new battleground was to be Pomerania, a German state occupied by Sweden.

The years of 1712 and 1713 were busy ones for Peter. He had a war to win, but he had a country to govern, too.

When he left for the Prut campaign he had tried the experiment of naming a "senate," composed of eight nobles, to administer civil affairs in his absence. This had worked so well that he continued a sort of congress under that name, adding the younger and more progressive boyars.

It was a long way from representative government, but it approached it more closely than the old "Duma." The Duma, composed of all the boyars, had concerned itself almost exclusively with deciding matters of social etiquette. Peter gave the senate taxing powers and authority over local governments. It was the feeble beginning of Russian self-rule.

The capital was being removed from Moscow to St. Petersburg. This involved a great deal of dashing back and forth between the two cities, persuading stubborn nobles to accept the change. It was theoretically accomplished in 1714, but it took ten years to transfer all the departments and settle resentful officials in Petersburg. Peter set the

example by building both a summer and a winter palace there.

Peter's allies in the Pomeranian war proved more dependable than those of the Balkans. By the end of 1713 the Swedish army, long unpaid and without their king to lead them, gave up their last German fortress. Peter left his allies to squabble over the territory regained, and turned his attention to Finland.

Sweden, although crushed on land, still had her fleet. Peter had dreamed of a naval battle, where his beloved ships might prove their worth, but so far there had been no opportunity.

Now, with two hundred Russian-built war-craft, he sought out the Swedish navy, then lying off Hangö Udd on the Finnish coast.

The victory that followed was second in importance only to Poltava, and in Peter's eyes was the supreme triumph of his career. Twenty years before, Russia had not possessed a single ship. Now, in their own vessels, built by Russian hands of sturdy Russian timber, they broke the dreaded Swedish fleet and sent its scattered remnants scurrying from the seas.

And—a further triumph for Peter's dream—they celebrated the victory in a brave new city which no more than the fleet had existed twenty years ago. The very soil upon which Petersburg stood had been wrested from the enemy.

The celebration was long and riotous. The Swedish admiral, Ehrenskjöld, who had been rescued from drowning when his flagship went down under him, was an honoured guest. Petersburg surpassed Moscow in the lavishness of triumphal arches. Tsar

Peter was unanimously promoted to be vice-admiral. He immediately went aboard ship, taking the captured Swedish admiral along "to teach me my duties."

The only discordant note in the general rejoicing was the conduct of Alexis. By the fortunes of war, Peter had scarcely seen his son since he had left him at Thorn two years before. He had proved as incompetent at purchasing army stores as at everything else. He was in Petersburg now with his young wife, but he refused to go to Menshikov's house, where the victory was celebrated, or to take any part in the festivities. His excuse was that his delicate health did not permit it.

Catherine had been rebuffed by her stepson when she tried to make friends with Charlotte. But after the young couple came to Petersburg she went one day to call at their house. She came back to Peter with a terrible story.

She had found the little German princess pale and wan, a ghost of her old merry self. Alexis, who would have forbidden "that woman" to enter his house, was away. Charlotte scarcely knew her mother-in-law, but at the first affectionate greeting she threw herself into her arms. Little by little, under gentle questioning, it all came out.

They had been happy at Thorn, Charlotte sobbed. But when they returned to Moscow—oh, then it all began. There was a monk, Father Ignatyev, who was with them always. And under his influence, Alexis had turned against his wife.

Everything she did, her clothes, the way she spoke or dressed her hair—they were all "foreign" and

hateful to him, it seemed. Alexis had taken her to a convent, a horrible gloomy place, where a horrible gloomy woman with wild eyes had looked at her as though she were an insect. "Take the foreigner away," she commanded. "She offends my sight."

It had been worse, a thousand times worse, after that. Alexis scarcely spoke to her from one day to another. She had hoped that when they came to Petersburg things might be different. But he had brought Father Ignatyev with him, and nothing was changed. Prayer, prayer, prayer, day and night, and endless long discussions.

Charlotte was allowed no friends; she never left the house. And only yesterday—her tears started anew as she thought of it—Auntie had sent her such a pretty silk pelisse, made in Paris. Alexis had ripped it off her and thrown it into the fire. No wife of his was to deck herself in sinful French fripperies, he said.

"But he never did that before," she answered Catherine's exclamation. "I don't think he'd have done it if he hadn't been drunk."

"Drunk? Do you mean that he——?"

The young wife nodded. "Oh, yes," she said simply. "Didn't you know? He drinks."

Catherine was puzzled. She really knew very little of this stepson who hated her. She knew him as a religious fanatic, given to prayer and fasting. That he should also be a drunkard was new, and somehow inconsistent.

"It takes a very little brandy to make Alexis drunk," Charlotte explained. "He says he must have it to give him strength, for you know his health is

very poor. But when he takes a drop too much he talks so wildly, all dreadful things against Papa Peter—oh, it frightens me! He hasn't many friends—most of them are his Lopukhin cousins, his mother's relatives. They come here and drink, and they all say dreadful things about the tsar. And—and about you, Mama Catherine."

"Yes?" Catherine's calm hand smoothed the bright head. "Tell me, little one. What do they say?"

"Well, they say Alexis will be tsar one day, and then it will be different. Russia will go back to the good old days. All the foreigners will be killed, and the ships burned. And—and they laugh and say *you* will go back to your wash-tubs, Mama Catherine. They say the real tsaritsa will come into her own. What do they mean by that? Aren't you the real tsaritsa?"

"Of course I am," Catherine answered firmly. "They mean nothing, child, it is only the wild talk of drunken men. But I am amazed to hear that Alexis drinks to excess. Doesn't his religion teach him that it is a sin?"

"Oh, he knows it's a sin. When he is sober he repents, and sets himself the most awful penances. Once in Moscow he went all the way from our house to the cathedral on his knees. On his knees, Mama, through all the muck of the street, and the beggars looking on and laughing. I was so ashamed! Surely that is not the way for a prince to act? And he keeps a little whip in his bureau, and when he is repentant he flogs himself with it. It—these things frighten me so! Sometimes I think he must be mad."



Little by little it all came out.

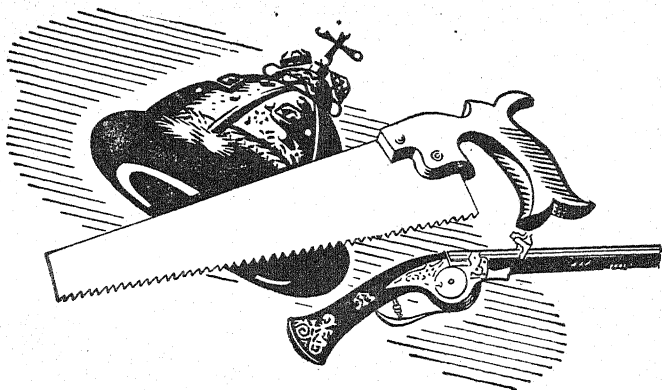
"Well, well, we must have patience." Catherine quieted the sobbing girl as best she could. "I'll speak to the tsar; perhaps he can do something. Cheer up now, and give me a cup of tea. Everything will come right, you'll see."

Catherine spoke to the tsar, and Peter spoke to his son. He spoke violently, threatening that if the boy did not mend his ways he would be disinherited.

Alexis listened in sullen silence, denied everything, and complained that the German wife who had been saddled upon him was a shrew and a scold who made his life intolerable. If he had been given a proper Russian wife, a pious woman like his sainted mother, it would have been better for everyone, he muttered.

Alexis was sullen, and Peter was furious. The scene between father and son was a most unpleasant one. Alexis afterwards told his friends that his father pulled his hair and slapped his face. It is very likely.





CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

"SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH"

CHARLOTTE, from shame and fright, had not told her mother-in-law the complete story.

As Catherine left the house she passed a young woman on the stairs. The girl was wearing an old-fashioned Russian gown, incredibly stained and filthy. Her feet were bare. She was coarsely good-looking, with magnificent yellow hair which might never have known a comb.

Catherine gave her the pleasant "good-day" with which she greeted all servants, but to her surprise the girl drew back, and with an insolent laugh spat directly into her path. The tsaritsa went quietly on her way, feeling a new pang of pity for poor little Charlotte who could not even keep her maids in order.

Afrosinia was not a servant. She was the sweetheart Alexis had found to sympathise with him in his hatred of everything new, to drink with him,

and to keep him constantly inflamed against his father.

It was not correct to say that he had found her. She had been found for him by "the bushy-beards," as Peter contemptuously called those conservatives who opposed his reforms. Alexis was surrounded by a little circle, Lopukhins and others, now out of favour at court but furtively plotting their way back to power.

Afrosinia was too stupid for plotting, but she was a useful instrument. Alexis had brought her to live in Charlotte's house, giving her authority over the servants, encouraging her to heap insults upon his unhappy wife. This was the crowning degradation which Charlotte's pride would not allow her to confess even to Catherine. Peter, unlike most tsars, discouraged tale-bearing, so it was not until he visited Charlotte's deathbed that he learned about Afrosinia.

In spite of her husband's displeasure, Charlotte maintained her new friendship with her mother-in-law. There was no great difference in age between them—Catherine was twenty-nine and Charlotte twenty-one. During the summer of 1715 they were drawn together by a common bond. Both expected to become mothers in the autumn.

Charlotte's baby was born first, on October 23. She was very ill, and so anxious to die that she refused food or medicine.

Catherine, herself confined to her bed, could not come to her, but Peter was with her when she died. For the first time he heard from her the whole wretched story of her husband's cruelty.

Peter, in his fury, would have had Afrosinia flogged at her bedside, but Charlotte shook her head. She wanted no revenge, she whispered. Only death, sweet, merciful death was all she prayed for now. Death came to her on the fourth day after her baby's birth.

Catherine's child, a boy, was born on the day of Charlotte's funeral. The tsaritsa was unfortunate in her babies. Of the twelve in all born to her, only two girls lived to grow up. The others died in infancy. There had already been a little Peter, who lived only a few days. The new baby was given the same name. So, by his mother's dying wish, was the young son of Charlotte.

For years now the tsar had swallowed his disappointment with Alexis, hoping against hope that he could still make a man of him. Unsatisfactory though he might be as a son and as a human being, he was the heir, the only one. Catherine had two living daughters, but the Russian aristocracy would never accept a woman ruler as long as there was a male heir. Peter's sister Sophia had found that out, to her fury.

With the events of the last week, however, the situation had changed. There were the two tiny Peters, son and grandson of the tsar. Charlotte's Peter did eventually have a brief reign as Peter the Second. Catherine's little son was to die before his second birthday, but his father could not foresee that.

Peter's wrath against Alexis was so terrible that Catherine feared he would do the boy bodily harm. She persuaded him to put his ultimatum in a letter instead of summoning his son to a personal interview.

The letter has been preserved. Patiently and at great length Peter reviews his aims for Russia, and the steps already accomplished. He speaks temperately enough of the many occasions upon which Alexis has been tried and found wanting.

Then, in language almost biblical, he closes with a solemn warning:

"How many years have I not pleaded with you, my son! Nothing has been of help; nothing has borne fruit; it has all been in vain; my words have been carried off by the wind. . . . Seeing, therefore, that I can turn you to nothing good, I have thought best to write you this last testament, and still wait a little to see whether in truth and without hypocrisy you change. If not, then know that I will deprive you of your right to the throne, and cut you off like a blasted limb. Do not think that you are my only son, and that I write this to frighten you. In very truth, by the will of God I will fulfil it. For as I have not spared my life for my country and my subjects, how can I spare you who are unfit?"

Alexis answered this dignified document with a letter of his own, a whining, cringing scrawl. He acknowledged himself unfit to rule, "quite devoid of memory, weak and puny of body and mind." He said that he was willing to renounce his claim to succession, if only his father would continue to support him.

The exchange of letters was interrupted by a dangerous illness of Peter's. On December 13 he became so weak that the last sacrament was administered to him.

Word spread through Petersburg that the tsar was

dying, and Alexis gathered his friends about him. At a wild drinking bout in his house a list was drawn up for the executioner. It contained the names of all Peter's ministers, most of the senate, four liberal priests, eight generals, three admirals, and Menshikov and Catherine and her children.

Whether Alexis actually planned to initiate his reign by wholesale murder, or whether the list was only a drunken folly, can never be known. Peter did not die, but recovered in time to go to church for the Christmas service. He was strong enough, too, to write Alexis a last letter. "Either you change your character," he wrote curtly, "or you become a monk. There is no other choice."

The tsarevich's friends advised him to accept the second alternative. Kikin, a minor admiralty official who hoped to be prime minister when Alexis came to power, told him, "A monk's cowl is not nailed on a man. It can be laid aside at will." Father Ignatyev ruled that vows taken by compulsion could be broken at any time.

Alexis wrote his father a brief three lines, saying that he would go into a monastery.

Peter's physician had urged him to go to Germany for treatment. He was anxious to make a final appeal to Alexis before he went, and sent for his son. Alexis promptly took to his bed, sending back word that he was too ill to come. Peter visited him at his house, and found him apparently so humble and contrite that his heart softened.

"Perhaps we can try again," he said. "A monk's life is not a happy one for a young man. You needn't hurry to take the vows. Think it over. If

you're willing to follow the straight road it is still open to you. I'll give you six months to make up your mind."

Peter departed for Danzig, taking Catherine with him. The short visit in search of health prolonged itself into nearly two years of travel. The war with Sweden was not ended, for Charles the Twelfth had returned from his Turkish exile to poke the dying embers into flame again. But it was a small bonfire now, and well under control. Peter felt that he could very well leave the final operations to his generals.

Wherever he went in Europe, he found himself the object of flattering attentions. His dear friend Augustus was waiting at Danzig to welcome him to Poland, now practically at peace. Peter visited Prussia and the other German states, and Denmark and France, and went back to Holland to look up the old comrades of his shipbuilding days. It was a triumphal progress far different from the modest journeyings of Peter the student. His health improved to some extent, although he was never to be a well man again.

He was at Copenhagen in Denmark when the six months' grace he had given Alexis expired. He wrote the tsarevich that, if he had made up his mind to mend his ways, he could join him there and take part in an expedition against the Swedes. This was to be a joint operation by Danes and Russians. It was not a campaign promising any great hardship. Alexis was to reply at once, Peter said, giving either the day he would start for Copenhagen or the name of the monastery he had



Peter visited Alexis at his house.

chosen. He was to take this as his father's last word.

Alexis, back in Petersburg, had chosen no monastery. He had promised Peter he would become a monk, hoping to gain time, hoping that his father's illness would prove fatal, or for some other reason known only to his own tortured heart. His character is not an easy one to understand. In his early youth he had held fast to principles that, however mistaken they may have been, he believed in sincerely. He had shown courage in holding to them against all the weight of his father's authority.

In the few years since his marriage, however, he had deteriorated badly. He had grown sly and servile in his father's presence; abusive behind his back. Constant drinking had weakened his already weak physique, and perhaps his mind as well. How far he was his own master, and how far a witless tool in the hands of unscrupulous plotters, there is simply no way of knowing this long after the event.

If his piety had been as deep as he pretended, it would seem logical to expect him to keep his promise and become a monk. That he did not do so may probably be traced to Afrosinia's influence. He was madly in love with her, and could not bring himself to give her up.

Upon receiving his father's letter, he wrote that he was starting for Copenhagen at once. He called upon Menshikov and received funds for the journey. In October, 1716, he set out, supposedly for Denmark. Afrosinia went with him. He told Menshikov he meant to leave her at Riga.

Once at the Livonian border, instead of continuing on to Riga the party turned south, and eventually

arrived at Vienna. Alexis travelled as a Russian officer, taking the name of Kockansky. Afrosinia, disguised as a boy, rode with his servants. Her presence was not suspected in Austria, although a manservant betrayed the secret when they arrived at Naples.

In Vienna he sought an audience with the Emperor, but succeeded only in seeing Count Schönborn, the Vice-Chancellor. In a high state of excitement Alexis poured out his story. He had come to beg for protection. His father, he declared, intended to kill him. And even if Peter should spare him, Catherine and Menshikov would surely contrive to poison him, "as they have tried many times to do." He was so incoherent that Schönborn took him for a maniac, and refused to take him to the Emperor.

The Austrian emperor was Charlotte's brother-in-law. He heard the Vice-Chancellor's report with little sympathy, and flatly declined to see the man whose cruelty had sent his wife's sister to her grave. But Austria was having diplomatic difficulties with Russia at the time, and the Emperor was not disposed to do Peter the favour of returning his erring son. He sent Alexis to Ehrenberg Castle, in the Tirol, and commanded Schönborn to keep the matter quiet.

Alexis, although in effect a prisoner, was treated as an honoured guest at Ehrenberg. He had his "page," Afrosinia, for company, the four servants he had brought with him, books to read and wine to drink. He settled himself comfortably to wait until his father's death, by illness or otherwise, should summon him back to the throne.

When the tsarevich failed to appear at Copenhagen,

Peter ordered a search for him. There were rumours that he had been eaten by wolves on the way, or captured by the Swedes. The Russian envoy at Vienna, with no help from the Emperor, finally traced him to Ehrenberg.

The envoy wrote to the tsar, and presently went to Schönborn with a letter from Peter, demanding that Austria surrender Alexis. Instead of doing so, the Vice-Chancellor warned the tsarevich that his hiding-place had been discovered, and suggested that he go at once to Naples, then an Austrian dependency. Alexis went, taking shelter in the castle of St. Elmo.

It required more than a year to find him, and to induce him to return. The Austrian Emperor and his viceroy at Naples refused to surrender him against his will, but he was not a welcome guest. Everyone was relieved when he announced that he would go back. It is believed that the Russian envoy Tolstoi bribed Afrosinia to influence him to this decision.

He agreed to return, but with a last gesture of defiance he took his own time about it. First he and Afrosinia went on a sight-seeing trip to Venice. She found the southern city so agreeable that she decided to remain there until Alexis should have straightened out his difficulties with his father.

On February 13, 1718, Alexis arrived at Moscow. Peter, who had returned from his European travels in the autumn, was awaiting him there.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

TRIAL AND DEATH OF THE TSAREVICH

ON the morning of February 14, 1718, Peter assembled a solemn conclave in the audience-hall of the Kremlin. It included the senate, the high-ranking boyars, the tsar's cabinet and officers of the army and navy. The diplomatic corps, representing every government of Europe, was present. Three battalions of Preobrazhenski surrounded the palace.

When Peter had taken his place on the throne Alexis was brought in. He stood in silence while Peter unrolled a document and began to read in his solemn deep voice.

Step by step the accusation detailed the care which had been taken with Alexis's education, his refusal to profit by it, the treatment of his wife, his relations with Afrosinia, and finally his desertion from the army and flight to a foreign court.

When he had finished, Alexis, prompted by Prince Tolstoi, unrolled a paper he had already prepared.

In it he confessed the truth of the charges against him, and begged for the tsar's mercy.

Peter turned to the assembly. "You have heard, gentlemen, the tsarevich does not deny the accusations. You can judge for yourself whether such a person is fit to rule over you after my death. In my judgment he is not. I therefore proclaim, as is my right, that Alexis Petrovich is no longer to be regarded as my heir. In his stead I decree that my second son Peter Petrovich shall succeed me."

Alexis signed a document renouncing his claim to the throne. The whole assembly then moved to the cathedral, where before the holy altar Alexis took a solemn oath of allegiance to his baby brother Peter. All of the nobles present took the same oath.

It seemed that the affair had come to a happy ending. Alexis had borne himself with dignity through out the ordeal. He dined with his father that night, and went on to Petersburg with him.

However, Peter, having punished his son, was equally determined to punish those persons who had influenced him to run away. Some arrests were made, and in the course of questioning some suspicious facts emerged. These seemed to point to a conspiracy to murder Peter and put Alexis on the throne.

If such a plot did exist, it did not come to light. Many of the prisoners admitted that they had hoped for Peter's death, but not one confessed, even under torture, to any plan for bringing it about.

What did emerge, and what from the tsar's point of view was far worse, was a widespread movement to end Peter's reforms when his life ended. This



Peter began to read in his solemn deep voice.

movement centred around Alexis. Peter's health was uncertain; sooner or later he must die. On that blessed day, Alexis had promised them, Russia would return to the ways of her fathers. Again the church would control the destinies of the faithful; the foreign heretics now so favoured at court would be burned at the stake. The ancient boyar families, who had been forced to send their serfs to army and factory, would have their slaves back to labour for their masters' profit. Everything would be as it had been in the good old days before Peter came to turn the country upside down.

This was the hour to which Peter had been unwittingly tending throughout all his long laborious years. Every reform, every affront the clergy and bigoted noble had been jealously chalked up against him. Over and over he had thought that some disputed measure had justified itself, that his people must have seen with their own eyes that the new ways were best. But the "bushy-beards," like the Bourbons of France, learned nothing and forgot nothing. They had swallowed their wrath, they had intrigued and connived, they had set themselves with the patience of stupidity to wait for the Day.

In the weakling tsarevich, hating his father and fearing him, they had found their instrument. It is unfair to say, since we know so little, that Alexis would have brought about or even condoned the assassination of Peter. But on the evidence of his own statements, made long before his arrest as well as after it, there can be no doubt that he did consider it his mission to restore the old order as soon as he had the power to do it.

Peter, realising at last what was afoot, was profoundly dismayed. He could deal with a murder plot; there had been many during his lifetime, quickly and ruthlessly punished. He had no particular attachment to life; he had risked death often enough on the battlefield. But the assassination being plotted now was not of a man, but of a nation; of that brave new Russia which he had wrought with such labour and love. How could one deal with a crime so hideous?

Peter knew only one way. Whatever the cost, this evil must be rooted out, cut off, as he had once written Alexis, like a shrivelled limb.

About five hundred persons, ranging from the Bishop of Great Rostov to Alexis's stable-boy, were arrested. They were the tsarevich's closest associates. The bishop, in public sermons, had told his flock that Peter was Anti-Christ, whom the Lord would devour with a consuming flame, restoring the land to its ancient peace.

Alexis, until late into the spring, was not arrested. He was at his father's house in St. Petersburg. When Afrosinia returned to Russia at the end of April he was allowed to see her in Peter's presence.

The girl, whether from stupidity or from eagerness to curry favour with the tsar, told of conversations in her presence, at which Alexis and his friends had planned his reign. She told of plans for the murder of Catherine and her children, and particularly of Menshikov, whom Alexis especially hated. She mentioned letters written from Austria, to various nobles and to Father Ignatyev and Eudoxia.

After listening to Afrosinia's testimony, Peter

ordered his son's arrest. Alexis was offered his final chance of pardon if he would name every person with whom he had discussed his plans for ruling Russia after his father's death. Peter was no longer interested in whether that death was to be brought about by murder, or whether it was to be awaited in the natural course of events. The important point was not how it was to come about, but what it was to bring to Russia.

Alexis, in his fortress cell, was sternly questioned. That questioning was accompanied by the knout, the customary police procedure. Over a period of two months he received forty lashes. This was light, compared with the treatment of the bishop and other witnesses, but the tsarevich's weedy frame and unbalanced nerves did not fit him to stand it. He suffered a bad physical and nervous breakdown, making it impossible to obtain any coherent statement from him. He named hundreds of men as his advisers, including the calendar of saints and other persons long dead.

The conspiracy was maddeningly difficult to fix upon anyone. Father Ignatyev, under severe torture, would admit only that, when Alexis told him in the confessional that he prayed for his father's death, he had said, "God will forgive you that sin, my son, for so pray we all." Peter knew well enough that this monk's influence had been largely responsible for making Alexis what he was, but he punished him only by banishment.

Eudoxia, in her convent, had thrown off her nun's robes when her son's letters came from Austria, and had commanded the sisters to address her as "Your

Majesty." But she also, when questioned, would admit to no graver fault. She was sent to another and stricter convent.

The Bishop of Great Rostov and a number of Alexis's boyar cousins and friends, who admitted having planned the new era with him, were executed. It is probable that they represented not a tenth of the conspirators involved.

Then, in June, 1718, a high court of justice was convened in St. Petersburg. It was composed of one hundred and twenty-seven senators, ministers, and officers of the armed forces. Before this body Peter detailed his son's offences. To them he put the question. What should be done with Alexis? He begged them to decide as their own consciences dictated, without fear of the consequences.

Alexis, cowering and shrinking, half mad with fear, was brought before them. They could not extract any sort of connected statement from him.

What it cost the tsar to expose to the world the whining cowardice of his son can only be guessed. It was an ordeal he might easily have spared himself. Alexis had run away when ordered to report for military service; on that single charge he could have been court-martialled and shot. He could have been shot anyway, on no charge at all, by his father's simple command. There was a formula in Russian law, hallowed by centuries of usage. "Word and deed of the tsar"—that was a legal and sufficient death warrant for any subject.

Peter had chosen deliberately not to avail himself of his royal rights. Of the charges against Alexis, the chief one was "plotting the ruin of his country."

This was a matter concerning the country itself, not the tsar. The Russia he would have slain must judge him.



Alexis was led back to his cell.

The high court unanimously agreed that he was guilty. They voted the penalty of death.

Alexis was led back to his cell. That night at supper

he fell to the floor in some sort of fit. The journal of the fortress calls it apoplexy. Most writers assume that it was the effect of the beatings he had received, combined with the terror of his appearance before the tribunal.

Two doctors attended him, and he was revived, and passed a peaceful night. But in the morning he was very weak. He was calm and rational. He asked to see his father.

Peter hurried to the bedside, accompanied by several ministers and some German and Scottish officers. They all agree that it was a touching one of final reconciliation.

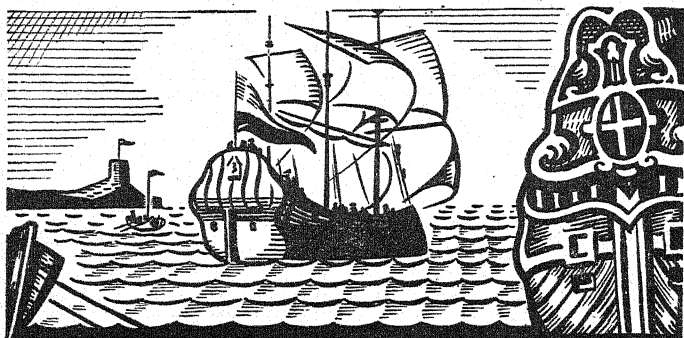
Alexis's delirium, or madness, or whatever it was that had possessed him, was completely gone now. Gone, too, was his spite and his cringing fear of Peter. In a few broken words he begged his father to forgive him, adding that he knew he had never been a fit son, and would be better dead.

Peter, kneeling by the bedside, racked with sobs, asked forgiveness in his turn. He had blundered, he had been a bad father.

"If only we could go back to Pleshcheyev and start all over!" he groaned. "Do you remember those days at the lake, boy? And the boat I made you? Oh, if I could turn back the years——!"

Incredibly it was the weakling son who comforted him. "You have little Peter, Father. May he be all to you that I have never been!"

Alexis received the sacrament and died peacefully before sunset. Peter, who had not yet signed the death sentence, was spared the painful necessity.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

RUSSIA TRIUMPHANT

THE war with Sweden, begun in 1700, was dragging itself to a close at last. It should have finished at Poltava, for never after that battle did the Swedes win a decisive victory. But Charles, who had vowed to dictate the peace in the Kremlin, held to his purpose with fanatic stubbornness, and his loyal subjects supported him to the end.

Peace negotiations, long-drawn-out and quarrelsome, were actually under way when Charles was killed by a stray musket ball as he was supervising the digging of trenches. This happened in the autumn of 1718. It was not a glorious death to one who would have preferred to meet his end on the battlefield. There was a strong suspicion, later proved unfounded, that the shot did not come from the besieged fortress but from one of his own men. That this story could be believed shows how war-weary the Swedes were. The passing of their hero

left them free to conclude peace on the best terms Peter would allow them.

The treaty of peace signed at Nystadt gave Russia Livonia, Estonia, Ingria, and the district of Finland centering around the port of Viipuri. All this territory had been Russian before the Swedish conquests. Peter did not take one square mile of land to which he had not a historical claim.

The inhabitants of the regained provinces were to keep all the rights they had enjoyed under Swedish rule. They were mostly Protestants, and they were to be permitted the free practice of their religion.

All prisoners of war were to be returned to Sweden at the tsar's expense, except those who preferred to remain in Russia. Of those who remained, homes and jobs were to be found for artisans. Soldiers were welcomed into the Russian army with the same rank they had held in their own.

Several hundred Swedes took advantage of this offer, marrying Russian wives and settling down to become good Russians. Officers of high rank, whose captivity had brought them the personal friendship of the tsar, were sent home loaded with presents, and with glowing letters commending them to the new Swedish queen.

The treaty was signed on September 10, 1721. The war had lasted twenty-one years. It had reduced Sweden to the rank of a second-rank power, assured for a time the independence of Poland, checkmated Charles's grandiose ambition to dominate the continent, regained lost Russian territory, established Russia as a formidable force in Europe, and opened the northern waterways to Russian trade. It had

also taught Russia the art of war on sea and land. As Peter wrote, "We were slow learners. It took us many years in a hard school, but our teachers were good, and now at last we have won our certificate."

The closing phases of the war were naval engagements fought within sight of the Swedish coast. Peter had divided his time between service with the fleet and St. Petersburg. He was on his way to the naval station at Viipuri when a ship was sighted bearing the news that the treaty had been signed. The small yacht carrying the tsar immediately put about and returned to the capital.

As the boat sailed into the harbour, decked with flags, her three guns booming, trumpet and drum sounding, an excited crowd gathered on Trinity wharf. The senate, overjoyed with the prospect of peace, hurriedly took counsel together as to how they could best honour their sovereign. They found the way that would please him best. As he stepped ashore they saluted him as a full admiral of the Russian navy.

Peter accepted this promotion, for which he had not even asked, with great pleasure. A few days later he announced his own gesture of thanksgiving. Throughout Russia the prison gates were to be opened. Everyone except those sentenced for robbery or murder was to go free. In addition, taxes were to be forgiven to all those unable to pay.

The usual week of fireworks and festivities followed. At a solemn service in the cathedral, the senate begged Peter to accept a new title. He who had been their tsar all these years was now to have



They saluted him as a full Admiral.

something grander, a title borrowed from ancient Rome. "Peter the Great, Emperor of all the Russias and Father of his Country," was what they called him now.

"Emperor" was a title so highly regarded that only one European sovereign had presumed to use it in Peter's day. The ruler of Austria bore it because he headed the "Holy Roman Empire," a rather mythical union chiefly of German states.

For Peter to call himself emperor was regarded as highly presumptuous by the Western European countries. England could not bring herself to recognise the title for twenty years. It was nearly fifty years before Spain accredited her ambassador to the emperor instead of the tsar. Peter himself accepted it more to impress upon his people that Russia was a new and different country than because he gloried in a Roman title. He liked the "Father of his Country" clause best.

The work of reconstruction, so vital after a long and wasting war, began at once. Mines and factories were expanded to give employment to demobilised soldiers. A system of canals linking Russia's great rivers had long been under way; now, with men and materials released from the war effort, construction could be speeded up. Foreign capital was eager to invest in Russian enterprises, and foreign experts of every kind crowded into the country.

The era of industrial development following the Swedish war would seem a pitifully small thing to modern eyes. It was accompanied, as was inevitable, by gross abuses. Men grew rich through sweated

labour; there was graft and corruption and mismanagement. Much of the blame for this must fall upon the foreign interests so eagerly welcomed by Peter. There is blame, too, for Russian officials willing to line their own pockets by devious methods.

Nevertheless, and with due allowance for its defects, the new system worked as Peter had hoped it would. Russia was by no means so well-governed as England, nor so prosperous as Holland. But she was at least within the sphere of comparison with those countries—something that had been unthinkable before.

In the two years following the Nystadt peace there occurred a minor war with Persia. This was another case of rescuing oppressed Christians—Armenians, this time, who had begged Russia for aid. It was fought on a small scale, and Peter did not consider it of much importance. But it did give him the northern shore of the Caspian Sea and part of the Caucasus. These conquests were not permanent. In 1732 the Empress Anne restored them to Persia, and they did not become Russian again for many years.

The Persian campaign was Peter's last war. It interested him far less than the social changes now crowding one upon another. Open opposition to reform seemed completely ended. Men who had grown up with Peter were in power everywhere; new customs that had once brought violent resentment were now commonplace. It seemed to Peter, worn with hardship and struggle, that he was justified in looking forward to long years of peace, governing in enlightened justice the civilised country of his own creation.



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

CORONATION OF CATHERINE

PETER's baby son had died in 1719. That left, as prospective heirs, the small son of Alexis and Catherine's two daughters, young girls in their teens. Also to be considered was Anne, Duchess of Kurland, daughter of Peter's dead brother Ivan.

In the year 1723 the question of the succession became a matter of importance. This was because of Peter's health, which was growing steadily worse.

The tsars of Russia had always nominated their own successors. The choice usually fell on the eldest son, but there was nothing in law or custom to prevent the tsar from naming any other person. His freedom of choice was limited only by the practical consideration of whether his candidate would prove acceptable to the church and to the boyars.

By this consideration Ivan's daughter Anne seemed to be ruled out. Her German husband was dead, but

she had become too thoroughly Germanised in thought and manner to please the Russians. When after three intervening deaths chance brought her to the throne, she justified these fears.

Anne was eventually to rule. So was Charlotte's Peter and Catherine's daughter Elizabeth. But Tsar Peter, anxiously planning a rule which should continue his own regime, ever mindful of the dangers exposed at the trial of Alexis, passed over all these young people. He chose the one person who he knew could be trusted to govern Russia as he would have it governed. He chose his wife.

On May 18, 1724, the imperial court, now established in Petersburg, returned to Moscow. Peter had made every effort to diminish the importance of the old capital, but for this solemn ceremony he was determined to follow ancient custom to the letter, so that there might be no question in any mind. For centuries the rulers of Russia had been crowned in Assumption Cathedral within the Kremlin wall; so should it be with Catherine.

The old Kremlin palace with its famous Red Staircase had been destroyed by fire years before. In its place rose a new and larger building, scarcely less hideous. But its windows opened wide to sunlight; it held no shut-off women's quarter. Peter's mother, heavily veiled, had stolen into church to watch her son crowned. Catherine walked serenely through the great portal, attended by her two young daughters and her ladies-in-waiting.

The procession crossing the open space between palace and cathedral was as gorgeous as money and care could make it. Before Catherine, on foot,

marched a guard of honour specially created for her, called "Knights of the Empress." It was composed of a hundred young nobles chosen for size and good looks, and the costuming was a wonderful thing to behold.

Peter had commissioned a Venetian artist to design the uniforms. The young man, dazzled by the command to spare no expense, had harked back to the Italian Renaissance for his motif. Well-formed limbs were set off by long silken hose of palest azure, doublets were of crimson velvet slashed with gold. There were dashing short capes of black velvet, embroidered in seed pearls and lined with gold brocade. Curled wigs, powdered with gold dust, were surmounted by puffed caps laden with white plumes. Jewelled swords and short daggers were the only arms carried.

Catherine, taking a first look at her resplendent guards, stuffed her lace handkerchief into her mouth and turned crimson with laughter. Peter looked at her anxiously.

"Don't you like them, my dear? I think they look very fine—really finer than anything I saw at the French court. But if they don't please you we'll tear those clothes off and dress them differently. Everything must be as *you* want it on your day."

At the tenderness in his tone her face sobered. "They look beautiful, Peter. I'll be very proud to be surrounded by such magnificence. But you are their captain—where is your uniform? Go put it on at once and let me see you."

"I don't have to wear it," Peter said thankfully. "You forget, darling, I'm going to put the crown



Catherine turned crimson with laughter.

on your head myself. I shall wear my father's robe of state—the one they couldn't divide between Ivan and me when we were crowned. That will make a very handsome spectacle, don't you think? Me marching ahead in my tsar's robes, and the guard following in their new silks and velvets? It will impress the 'bushy-beards,' and the foreigners, too."

"You want to impress them, Peter? Why?"

"Let me see if I can tell you. It's for *you*, my heart. So that all Russia and all the world shall know what you are to me—what your fidelity has meant all these years, and your courage, and your strength. What you have been to *me* you are to be to *them*, after I am gone. I want them to know."

"Peter!" She caught his arm and shook it violently. "'After you're gone'—how can you say such things? Are you—do you feel ill? Tell me!"

"Of course not!" He laughed reassuringly. "I've never felt better. Why do you ask such a silly question?"

"Well, I thought—you mustn't *say* such things, Peter! It upsets me. Go now, and put on your robes. It is almost time."

They had been chatting in the audience room, where the guard and most of the court were already assembled. Peter hurried off just as the little princesses entered, very charming in pale blue and pink.

"Mama darling! Oh, you look *beautiful!*" The girls circled about their mother, feeling the folds of heavy red velvet, gold-embroidered, of the long train they were to carry.

Catherine was beautiful. At thirty-six, her dimpled

girlish prettiness had passed into a serene, stately beauty for which "queenly" was the only word. She was as simple and kind as she had ever been, but she had acquired a new graciousness with the years. Sorrow had touched her; anxiety about Peter's welfare, the death of her babies, and the dreadful strain of her stepson's tragedy. But she was sunny and cheerful still, always readier to laugh than to weep.

"Martha Skavronsky! Where is my clean shirt?"

She started as a voice spoke behind her in pretended anger, and turned around.

"Danilovich! How grand you are. But I could have done a better job on that lace." She laughed. "It doesn't seem so long ago, does it? Those days when you brought me back from Marienburg to be your laundress. I was terribly frightened of your fine house, Danilovich."

"You frightened? I can't believe it. In fact, it's very difficult for me to believe that you ever were that little Martha. Anyone looking at you would swear that you were born in a palace."

"Really, Danilovich?" Her voice was a little wistful. "I've wondered if it was wise of Peter to insist on this coronation. Of course, to *him* I'm perfect. But what will they think, these boyars with their long pedigrees? They know I'm nothing, a nobody. We've never tried to hide it. Will they have me for their empress?"

"You need not worry, Catherine." Menshikov had bent to kiss her hand, but now he held it in a firm comradely clasp. "In the beginning it's true they resented you. But all that is long since dead. They've seen for themselves that you're that rarest thing on



Peter himself placed a



magnificent crown on her head.

earth, a truly royal lady. High and low, the Russian people worship you, my dear. So put your mind at rest."

"I'll try—you're very comforting, my friend. But Danilovich"—her hand twisted uneasily in his—"I must ask you something. I don't know how to say it—I *hate* to say it! But—Peter has planned all this because he means that I shall be empress when—when—no, I can't say it!"

"Say 'if,' Catherine," he advised her. "It makes it easier."

She gave him a grateful glance. "Yes. If he should die, he expects me to rule. How *could* I, Danilovich? No, never mind the pretty speeches. This is what I want to ask you. If—if that should ever happen, God forbid!—would you help me?"

His steady hand tightened on hers. "I would help you, Catherine. You could count upon me to the death. But may that day never come!"

"Amen!" she smiled at him with moist eyes. "You are a good friend, Danilovich. Listen!"

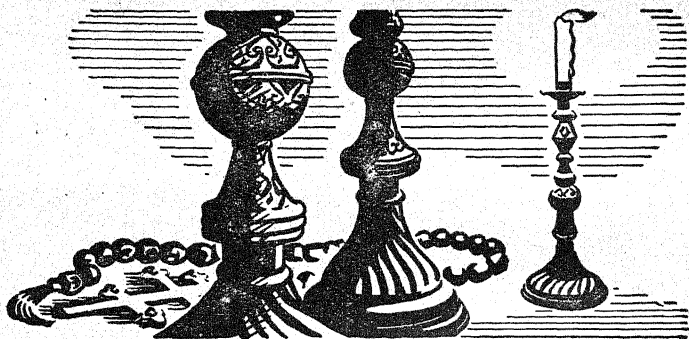
All the bells burst into joyous clangour just as Peter returned. He formed the musical-comedy guards into rank, the children took up their mother's train, the nobles and their ladies came forward. Slowly, majestically, the procession moved out into the sunlit square.

In the cathedral the Archbishop of Novgorod said prayers and examined Catherine in the tenets of the Orthodox faith. Peter himself placed upon her head a magnificent crown set with two thousand precious stones, surmounted by an immense pigeon's blood ruby supporting a diamond cross. He read aloud a

long scroll setting forth all her good deeds, with special mention of the wisdom and devotion by which she saved the army of the Prut. Among the diamonds and rubies glowing on her breast she wore the cheap enamel brooch given her by those grateful soldiers.

After the ceremony at Assumption the coronation party made the rounds of all the principal churches, scattering gold and silver coins, being hailed everywhere by enthusiastic crowds. Menshikov, who was not always remarkable for strict accuracy, had told the truth when he said that the people loved Catherine. Russia has had few empresses more worthy to be loved.





CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

PETER'S PASSING

THE summer of 1724, following Catherine's coronation, was spent at Peterhof, the new summer palace outside St. Petersburg.

It was a pretentious place designed by a French architect, set in formal grounds elaborately landscaped and over ornamented by fountains. Peter had been enchanted by it at first, but now he suddenly decided that its cold formality was hateful to him. He built himself a small wooden cottage in a corner of the park and spent most of his time there.

To Catherine's distress, Peter was growing peevish and crotchety. Except for his occasional rages, as sudden and as quickly over as a summer storm, he had always been good-natured. Even now he was never irritable with her, but in that last uneasy summer he managed to quarrel with almost everyone else.

There was a violent falling-out with Menshikov.

Danilovich, despite his loyalty to Peter personally; was one of many Russian officials who were not above turning a dishonest kopek when the opportunity offered. In his position as the tsar's favourite companion the opportunities were plentiful. Danilovich accepted bribes for granting mining concessions to foreign capitalists, and more than once he sold convicts from the state prisons to work them.

This had happened before, and had been forgiven. Peter knew quite well that Menshikov, with all his splendid qualities of heart and mind, lacked the one simple virtue of honesty. When he caught him in some crooked trick he lectured him furiously and made him give the money back. Afterwards the two friends laughed over the episode and forgot it.

That had been the way of it in all the years of their association. The offence that came to light in 1724 was no worse than any of the others. Danilovich light-heartedly assumed that the consequences would be no different.

But Peter, with his new irritability, would not have it so. This time, he decreed, Menshikov must not only return his illegal profits, but he must pay four times the amount into the state treasury as a fine.

The figure thus arrived at was greater than Menshikov possessed at the moment, and greater than he had any honest means of obtaining. Unluckily for him, Peter's newly aroused vigilance made it difficult to obtain it by the obvious dishonest means. Peter refused to speak to him until the money was paid.

This attitude, so unlike the old easy-going Peter,

was easily explained. He was a sick man. His rugged physique had been subjected to a great many strains, and it was breaking down.

It is usually charged that the most injurious of these strains was liquor. That is debatable. He was never a drunkard, in the sense that drink was necessary to him. He drank for good fellowship, and he drank enormously. But his malady was nephritis, which attacks non-drinkers as frequently as the intemperate. Of course, alcohol is not recommended as a cure for it.

Peter had not spent all his time at the banquet table. There were those years in the field, sleeping on the bare ground, eating whatever the army kitchens provided. There were days of back-breaking labour in the building of Petersburg, standing hip-deep in the icy water. He had great strength, and great pride in it. He would never admit that he was tired, or that a job was too much for him. He drove himself, as he drove everyone else, past the point of human endurance. And in the end he paid for it.

It was an anxious summer for the Empress, trying to make him rest, hopefully calling in new doctors, patching up his quarrels. As the summer waned it seemed that her efforts were having some success. He felt much better in the autumn, and spent some happy days cruising in the Gulf of Finland.

Late in November, at twilight of a cold rainy day, he sailed his yacht into the Bay of Kronstadt near Petersburg. A storm was brewing, and he saw a boat full of boys aground on a sandbar. With all his old energy Peter dashed to their rescue.

The storm broke in a fury of icy wind and rain.

The boys on the stranded boat, a frail little pleasure craft they had taken out for a day's sail, were frantic. They were on their knees praying, apparently unable to do anything to save themselves.

Peter, approaching as close as he could, jumped into the shallow water and by a superhuman effort pulled the boat clear. It was leaking badly, and the boys were too terrified to bail it out or to try to wade ashore.

Buffeted by the storm, Peter and his men worked all night removing the boys from the boat, carrying them ashore and reviving them around great bonfires. Twenty lads owed their lives to Peter's efforts.

When it was all over, he went to bed with a violent attack of abdominal pain and a high fever. After a week or so he recovered enough to go home to his beloved Petersburg. He never left it again.

Catherine, with a sad premonition that the end was near, insisted on a reconciliation with Menshikov. Peter did not oppose it. He welcomed Danilovich to his bedside with a feeble joke, spoken above pain so fierce that it made him clench his teeth.

There were doctors and nurses in plenty, but he wanted no one near him but those two. His mortal pain was too great to yield to Catherine's soothing touch, but she worked away without rest, rubbing and patting, murmuring her tender endearments. Menshikov, white-lipped, joked desperately, rewarded rarely by the ghost of Peter's old laughter. With breaking hearts they tended him, the pastry-cook's boy and the washerwoman he had raised to high estate. He had given them much, but the giving was not all on his side.

For a short time it seemed that he was getting better. On Epiphany Sunday he left his bed for the blessing of the Neva, an annual religious festival. He was pale and wasted, and the people crossed themselves when they saw how feebly he walked, and how his hand shook as he held the candle.

He went home to bed, and he did not rise again. On February 2 he received extreme unction. On the same day he signed a proclamation pardoning all exiles and setting free all political prisoners. He died in Catherine's arms on the morning of February 8, 1725, in his fifty-third year.

Catherine succeeded him. She did not need to remind Menshikov of his promise, for he was at her side, guiding and counselling her with unswerving devotion. He was her prime minister, and the country has had no greater one. She lived only two years, but while her reign endured it was all that Peter would have had it.

What happened afterwards, the gradual return of much that Peter had thought forever abolished, is part of Russia's tragic history. It is no part of Peter's. His country had yet a long, hard road to travel. But it is Peter's everlasting glory that he first envisioned the outline of that road, and hewed out its rough beginning.

THE END